Julius Fiedler

Naturally Vegan

"Beautiful and inspiring. Julius celebrates the utter joy of good food"
Jamie Oliver

Delicious recipes from around the world *that just happen to be plant-based*

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DK [RED]

For my parents, for Stasja, who instilled my love for food and life.
For all the cooks who came before, through whom these recipes came to be.

How to use this e-book

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Introduction

I have always wanted to tell stories. But—despite having a larger-than-life appetite for as long as I can remember—it took me until the end of my film degree to realize that the ones that made me tick were not fictional tales; they were about food. I remember watching the *Two Greedy Italians* driving through Italy in their 1956 Giulietta Spider. Seeing Antonio Carluccio and Gennaro Contaldo taste the endangered fruits of their home, and witnessing their genuine joy, gave me an insatiable appetite to experience food not only for its flavors, but as an opportunity to learn about a culture.

After graduating from university with a documentary about British Cheddar cheese, I was fortunate enough to join Jamie Oliver's team—first as a production runner, soon after as a food stylist. Without any culinary background, it was during these years that I properly learned my way around the kitchen and saw for myself how Jamie turned food into a story worth sharing. When the Covid pandemic struck, things took another unexpected turn. I suddenly found myself at home with several bakery-sized sacks of flour on my shelves and too much time on my hands. Eventually, inspired by my sourdough starter "Hermann," I decided to host free, live baking classes online. Participants tuned in from all over the world, and with the first dose of stage fright out of the way, my classes evolved into more widely themed recipe videos that I shared on social media. I remember uploading my first TikTok video and the next day waking up to half a million views. Suddenly, there was an audience. But what was the story?

It was around that time that I happened to switch to a plant-based diet. Initially, I felt lost in a world of modern foods that lacked a connection to the cultural heritages I had grown to love. My solution was to look back in order to move forward, and to learn from those who have eaten plant-based all along. Which is when I stumbled across the treasure trove of dishes to which this book is dedicated.

Naturally Vegan is a collection of traditional plant-based dishes from around the world, and the stories behind them. Though they were never labeled "vegan"—they might be called *nistisima*, "the cooking of the poor," or simply considered an everyday part of a religious diet—they all happen to be entirely plant-based. It's certainly not a complete collection—there are far too many to capture them all in a single edition. But it's a first step to shine a light on the traditional plant-based food that has stood the test of time. With so much of modern veganism aimed at replicating animal products and veganizing traditional meat-, dairy-, or egg-based dishes, it's an opportunity to pause and say: "Look, this is what plant-based food can also be like. We've done it all along."

Whether you're following a plant-based diet or not, it doesn't matter. The recipes in this book are a celebration of the lesser-explored dishes of a vibrant diversity of cultures. Above all, they are a window to a world where we don't separate by diet, but instead unite over the most universal joy of all: good food.

The Roots of Veganism

Vegan food is not a modern invention. It's a modern label. When members of London's Vegetarian Society called a meeting to differentiate between vegetarians who ate eggs and dairy and those who did not, the term "vegan" was coined. The year was 1944. But long before that, plant-based dishes were already ingrained in the historic and social fabric of most cultures.

Religion

Since the dawn of Hinduism some 3,000 years ago, religious devotees have followed "*ahimsa,*" a guiding principle that translates to "do no harm" and applies to all living creatures. Slaughtering animals for food was considered unnecessary violence and, although dairy was permissible but not always accessible or affordable, many popular dishes such as Idli, Sambar and Pani Puri have always been plant-based. Today, 44 percent of Hindus living in India still follow a mostly vegetarian diet. When I attended a Hindu wedding with more than 1,500 guests in Kerala, the menu was, as per tradition, entirely vegetarian, and nearly half of it happened to be vegan.

With the rise of Buddhism, which also follows the principle of *ahimsa*, vegetarianism began to spread from India to other parts of the world. Traveling Buddhist monks first arrived in China during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). An absence of dairy meant that their diets were essentially vegan (many vegetarian Buddhists also avoid eggs) and they started using plant-based ingredients to naturally recreate the foods of the local culture. It was Buddhist monks who discovered that by rinsing glutinous wheat dough they were able to remove the starches, creating a food with a chewy, spongy texture that resembled meat.

This form of Chinese wheat gluten is still used today in the Shanghainese dish Kǎo Fū. Later, Buddhists brought it to Japan, where it was eventually given its modern name "seitan." As the religion took hold in Japan in the sixth century CE, *shōjin ryōri*, the Japanese Buddhist cuisine that is entirely dedicated to plantbased cooking, began to take shape. The process of creating intricate dishes such as Goma Dofu became a means for monks to practice self-discipline in pursuit of enlightenment. Similarly, tempe, made from fermented and pressed soybeans, became a staple of monks' diets in Indonesia, and remains a key ingredient in traditional dishes like Tahu Tempe Bacem.

Ahimsa may be a lifelong principle, but many religions observe some form of fasting, when animal-based foods are off the table. During Lent, a 40-day period commemorating Jesus' 40 days and nights in the desert, Greek Orthodox Christians typically follow a plant-based diet. *Nistisima*, the Greek fasting food, is devoted to recipes that are suitable during this period, featuring popular dishes such as Fakes, Spanakorizo and Melitzanosalata.

In Egypt, Coptic Christians are often credited with the invention of falafel as a fasting alternative to meat. In Lebanon, those of faith made *kibbeh* (finely minced meat mixed with bulgur and spices) with pumpkin instead of meat, turning it into what is known today as Kebbet Laa'tin. And Spanish Christians observed the "softer" fasting rules of the Catholic church by serving plant-based dishes such as Espinacas con Garbanzos on meat- and dairy-free Fridays.

It doesn't stop with Christianity. From *pareve* foods (which exclude meat and dairy) within the Jewish dietary laws of *kashrut*, to *Ital*, the Rastafari diet, whose adherents tend to abstain from meat and to focus on fresh, natural foods to benefit spiritual energy, dishes around the world have been shaped by religious beliefs.

Necessity

It's not religion alone that paved the way for naturally plant-based dishes. Nowadays, vegan food is often criticized for being expensive, but many of the dishes in this book are rooted in poverty. At a time when animal-based products were a luxury reserved for the wealthy, less-fortunate families had to craft nourishing meals out of what little they had available. Today, *cucina povera*, the cooking of the poor, is famous for its use of humble ingredients and ingenious cooking methods that have led to many classics of Italian cuisine. Those serving at noble banquets would gather the bread that was left over and combine it with vegetables and legumes to make the soup that we now know as *ribollita*.

Lampuga, a type of fish, was commonly served with a sweet-and-sour sauce, a typical dish of Sicilian aristocracy. Peasants who couldn't afford such luxuries began using eggplants instead, laying the groundwork for what would become Caponata. In Tuscany, poorer communities foraged for fallen chestnuts, which they dried and milled into flour—a free alternative to wheat that became the foundation of the chestnut cake Castagnaccio. And many southern Italian pasta shapes, such as those used in Lolli con Fave, were traditionally made with only water and durum wheat flour because eggs were too expensive.

Cucina povera might be the most famous example, but many dishes around the world emerged from the need to make use of inexpensive and leftover ingredients. Persian home cooks who couldn't afford lamb turned to yellow peas as a source of protein for Khoresh Bademjan. Korean cooks would mix leftover vegetables from the day's harvest into a simple batter to make savory pancakes called Yachaejeon. Similarly, Mallorcans combined whatever produce was growing in the garden to create Sopas Mallorquinas, a flavorful soup thickened with stale bread.

Climate

What we eat has always been at the mercy of nature and sometimes it is the climate itself that determines the course of our food evolution. With an absence of lush pastures comes an absence of cows, which is why in India dairy is used predominantly in the north, while in the south, where coconut palms are abundant, a range of curries, chutneys, and desserts are flavored with coconut milk. In Italy, the dry Sicilian climate favors the growth of almond trees and today *latte di mandorla*, almond milk, is a traditional drink as well as an ingredient for desserts including Biancomangiare.

Trade

International trade has also played a part in the creation of naturally plant-based dishes. The Indian Ocean trade routes saw ingredients and cooking methods from the Indian subcontinent arrive in Southeast Africa, which led to dishes such as the spiced, red-bean stew Maharagwe. Or the many nodes of the Silk Road, which explain the influence of Persian cuisine on Georgian dishes like rolled, stuffed eggplant slices, Nigvziani Badrijani. This is but a mere snapshot of the complex web of our human trajectory, yet even scratching the surface helps us understand why plants have always found a way to our plates.

A way to connect

While traveling to research recipes for this book, the one similarity I experienced around the world was that people took immense pride in sharing this part of their cuisine. Once you get past the term "vegan" and instead talk about Türkiye's *zeytinyağlılar* (dishes slowly braised in olive oil), the impact of *ahimsa* on India's food culture, or Italy's *cucina povera*, people's eyes truly light up. Asking Tuscan waiters for vegan options will most likely result in a few jokes, but start a conversation about the complexity of a *ribollita* and they share stories from their childhood while rolling out the *digestivo*.

Cook's Notes

It goes without saying that the dishes in this book are not my invention. These are foods I've tasted on my travels, learned amid the steaming pots in trattorias, at hawker stalls, and in home kitchens, and discovered during years of research, before writing them down into a formula that will, I hope, enable you to cook and serve them at your own table. They are recipes that have been passed down from generation to generation, and are therefore deeply rooted in culture and steeped in immeasurable amounts of pride.

To honor that, I have tried to prepare them as authentically as possible, following traditional methods, using traditional ingredients. I've come to learn that, more often than not, an ingredient or step we may not know or understand at the time comes to play a crucial part in the food's success later on. When speaking to people, it was often the elders of a culture who knew innately that fermenting your own batter for Idli makes them easier to digest, and that using seasonal, natural ingredients is the undisputed key to unforgettable flavors.

Sometimes this means that the recipes can seem time- and labor-intensive. Throughout the book, I recommend substitutions and shortcuts to speed up the process where possible, but if you can, I encourage you to try these recipes the way they were intended to be prepared. Time is a magical ingredient, especially in plant-based cooking, which can't make use of fatty animal products to provide a quick flavor boost or satisfying mouthfeel. Time doesn't just transform food from raw to cooked, but from bland to rich, from soft to caramelized, and from liquid to creamy.

Behind each of these recipes lie techniques that have stood the test of time, and new skills to be discovered. By adding them to our culinary toolbox, we can reach beyond the pages of this book and apply them to what's available all around us. That way, we cook food not just by following a recipe but by embracing a principle.

Countries and regions

As you look through the recipes, you'll notice that each dish is paired with a country or region heading. Many of these dishes have complex or sensitive histories that cross borders, and these headings aren't meant to claim their true origin, but to highlight that a recipe has become a beloved part of a specific food culture. These are the versions that have inspired me on my own travels and in my research, and that I would like to share with you.

Cooking times

All recipes are listed with their *Active* and *Total* cooking time.

> ACTIVE TIME 1 hour 5 minutes
> TOTAL TIME 1 hour 30 minutes

The *Active time* will give you an idea of how long you'll be busy in the kitchen—this includes steps like gathering your ingredients from the unknown depths of your pantry, rinsing vegetables, and peeling garlic cloves. There have been too many occasions on which I was excited by the promise of whipping up a 30-minute dinner, only to spend another 30 minutes prepping the produce. I hope to spare you from that experience.

The *Total time* is the active time plus any passive cooking time and will give you an indication how long it will take until the food hits the table. This always includes the most time-demanding method, such as cooking legumes from scratch.

Ingredients

Weights for vegetables, herbs, and aromatics such as ginger are before rinsing, peeling, or trimming. After rinsing herbs for salads or cold dishes, make sure they are well dried so they don't water down the dressing or sauce. For ease, I have included volume measurements (teaspoons and tablespoons) for ingredients below 1¾oz (50g), but measuring tomato or pepper pastes by tablespoon can be tricky.

For reference, you can follow 1 tablespoon of tomato/pepper paste = 25g (scant 1oz).

Salt measurements are based on fine sea salt and are to taste. After all, seasoning depends on many factors, like the ripeness of ingredients. But the measurements should give you a good starting point for a well-seasoned meal, especially for dishes that are difficult to adjust afterward, such as the rice- and lentil-

based dish Mujaddara. Keep in mind that different types of salt differ in volume. If you want to be precise, you can follow 1 tablespoon of salt = 14g and 1 teaspoon of salt = 7g. If a dish tastes under-seasoned after cooking, and it's too late to adjust in the pan, serve it with a sprinkle of flaky sea salt.

To weigh olive oil, you can count 1 tablespoon as 10g, or simply multiply the milliliters by 0.9.

Finely grated garlic is best achieved with a Microplane, giving you a purée that almost melts into the sauce. A box grater would be a little too coarse; crushing the garlic using a garlic press is the better option.

I also highly recommend getting a reliable digital scale that can measure up to 11lb (5kg). Using a digital scale allows you to quickly combine ingredients, including liquids, in a single bowl or (cold) pan without having to first measure them out separately.

Stove types and ovens

All the recipes were tested on a gas stovetop. For electric and induction stovetops, the cooking times might vary slightly, as might the temperature range, so you may need to adjust accordingly. Frustratingly, ovens can also vary dramatically. Use the indicated time as a reference point, but always check your food a little bit before to prevent it from burning.

Deep-frying

I am personally not a fan of deep-frying—for health reasons and because it's so difficult to dispose of used cooking oil at home—yet it is one of the quickest ways to cook food and impart flavor, without the need for electronic gadgets, and therefore features in many traditional dishes. Where possible, I've given an alternative to use the oven instead.

Legumes

Cooking legumes from scratch is a surefire way to better flavor and, especially if you're using a pressure cooker, it's far more economic than buying precooked legumes that need to be processed, packaged, and transported. Below are a few things to keep in mind.

Most legumes need to first be soaked in water for 8–12 hours to allow them to cook properly. I prefer doing this overnight and simply leave them until needed. Adding 1 tablespoon of salt per 4⅓ cups/1 liter of soaking water helps to break down the outer skins of tougher legumes, allowing them to cook more quickly the next day.

In warmer climates, or during summer days, the soaking water may begin to smell funky after around 12 hours, which is a sign that the legumes are starting to ferment. Unless it's extraordinarily warm, this is usually not a problem, and after draining and rinsing they are still safe to be used. If you prefer, you can either let them soak in the fridge or simply drain, rinse, and add more fresh water (no need to add more salt at this point).

Cooking legumes in a pan

Cooking duration, from the point the water begins to boil, can vary from 5 minutes for certain types of lentils to 2 hours for tougher legumes. Exactly how long they take depends on many factors, from the way they were grown to the age of the legumes. Try to find a reliable source that gives you consistent results.

Legumes also cook faster in alkaline (the opposite of acidic) environments, which can be achieved by adding baking soda to the cooking water. It's the ideal hack for the creamiest Hummus, for which the chickpeas are cooked to a point where they literally fall apart. For other dishes, I avoid using baking soda as it changes the flavor and drives up the sodium intake.

Adding salt *during* cooking slows down the process, so only season the water once the legumes have reached the desired tenderness; cook for 5 minutes (lentils) or 10 minutes (beans and peas) more to season from within.

Some legumes, including chickpeas and red lentils, will develop a thick foam on top as they begin to boil. It's best to skim this off to prevent the water from boiling over. For the same reason, only cover the pan with a lid if there is plenty of space within. Otherwise, leave it ajar or simmer uncovered.

Cooking legumes in a pressure cooker

If you cook legumes regularly, a pressure cooker will be your best friend. It can cut down the cooking time tremendously, often by more than 80 percent, saving energy and water. No wonder that cultures from Italy to India have long embraced it as an essential kitchen tool.

It's always best to refer to the manual of your cooker, since models vary, but generally, there are two options when it comes to cooking your soaked legumes. Once the pressure has built up, you can either cook them for the recommended time and then release the pressure manually, or, my preferred method, you can cook them for half of the recommended time, turn off the heat, and simply let the pressure release naturally while the cooker cools down (20–30 minutes).

The latter method means that chickpeas, which can take around 90 minutes to cook in a pan, take a mere 7½ minutes in a pressure cooker! Another bonus is that you can add the salt directly to the pressure cooker (around 1 tablespoon per 4⅓ cups/1 liter of water), skipping the additional step of seasoning the legumes afterward, and saving even more time. I generally don't add salt to the soaking water when using a pressure cooker, though it helps to make the skins a little softer.

To cook 11oz (320g) of dried legumes in 4⅓ cups (1 liter) of water, you'll want a pressure cooker with a minimum volume of 3⅔ quarts (3.5 liters), since most cookers should be filled up no more than halfway, allowing space for any foam to rise. If you still struggle to release the pressure because of built-up foam, let the pressure release naturally as described previously.

The chart will give you an idea of how many minutes you'll need to cook the legumes used in this book, either in a pan or using a pressure cooker. The time it takes is measured from the point the water starts boiling or the pressure has built.

Using canned/jarred legumes

Canned and jarred legumes make a convenient substitute when you're in a hurry. Generally speaking, dried legumes double to triple in weight after soaking and boiling, meaning that 11oz (320g) is roughly the same as three 14oz (400g) cans (8½oz/240g drained) or two 1¼ lb (570g) jars (14oz/400g drained). While canned legumes are drained and rinsed for the recipes in this book, jarred legumes can usually be added straight from the jar, or after draining if there's a lot of residue stock.

When substituting, keep in mind that jarred legumes are usually seasoned, while canned legumes are not. For recipes in which the legumes are added unseasoned, as for Chana Masala, you'll need to adjust by using less salt (½ tsp per jar) in the dish, if using jarred legumes.

Equally, for recipes in which the legumes are seasoned before being added, as for Kuru Börülce Salatası, you'll need to season the canned legumes. To do this, first bring the legumes to a boil in well-seasoned water, and cook for 5 minutes before draining and adding to the dish.

Legume/Device (time in minutes)	**Pan**	**Pressure cooker**
Black-eyed beans	60 mins	8 mins
Cannellini (white kidney) beans	60 mins	10 mins
Chickpeas	90 mins	15 mins
Fava beans	90 mins	15 mins
Moong dal (split mung beans)	30 mins	7 mins
Navy beans	75 mins	10 mins
Red kidney beans	60 mins	10 mins
Toor dal (split pigeon peas)	45 mins	8 mins
White peas	90 mins	14 mins
Yellow split peas	20 mins	5 mins

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Appetizers

There is a virtue to hospitality that transcends borders, shatters stereotypes, and transforms the act of eating into a social event. Pride. Not the pride that comes from self-idolatry, but a beautiful pride. A sense of satisfaction derived from sharing the joys of our own discoveries with others. When it comes to food, such pride is often observed at the beginning of a meal. And it's surprisingly universal.

Imagine a rustic trattoria set on the outskirts of a Tuscan town. Faded black-and-white photographs adorn the walls alongside worn newspaper clippings, while generations of families gather over plates of ancestral food, and well-turned-out waiters zoom around the dining room, making their way to your table to take your order. Mention that you're vegan and you may be met with a blank stare or textbook jokes. But demonstrate a sense of curiosity about the region's food and the mood shifts. Pride kicks into gear and your host will most likely open their heart... and larder. It happened to me countless times.

Suddenly, the restrictions of a plant-based diet give way to possibilities beyond the menu. In the Tuscan city of Lucca, chef Maria Soledad Cardenas of Ristorante Mecenate rushed to the kitchen to top grilled crostini with a slow-cooked bean purée and a drizzle of local olive oil. She served them while telling stories about the nearly extinct local *rosso di Lucca* bean that she tries to preserve in her kitchen. In Türkiye, confectioner Mustafa Öztapacı was at first taken aback that I couldn't eat any buttery sweets, but then quickly disappeared into his neighboring shop to emerge with *simit* (bagel-like sesame-crusted breads) and *biber salçası*, red-pepper paste. He insisted on serving a quick snack along with my tea before I joined him on his day's shift of making Lokma, a local specialty of fried dough balls that are soaked in a rose water–flavored sugar syrup.

It's these gestures that set the stage for a memorable experience. And that is precisely the joy of appetizers. They are a sign of hospitality, of caring for your guests. Be it the simple act of sharing good-quality ingredients at the prime of their season, such as extra virgin olive oil and savory tomatoes for Pan con Tomate, or by engaging in a labor of love, such as rolling and stuffing dozens of golden-fried eggplant slices for Nigvziani Badrijani. Appetizers remind us why food is a shared experience. Biting into the flavor-packed crispy dough balls called Pani Puri for the first time with friends is guaranteed to result in excitement, while slurping cold noodles that'll numb your tongue (see Liang Fen) is a sensory icebreaker.

Appetizers do much more than awaken the appetite. They stimulate the universal love language of food. They create memories. And once we clear the plates and hurry back into the kitchen to serve the main event, they make us feel proud of having shared that moment, while leaving us excited that it was only the beginning.

TRATTORIA

Sunomono: *Cucumber & Seaweed Salad*
Nigvziani Badrijani: *Eggplant Rolls with Walnut Filling*
Goma Dofu: *Sesame Tofu*
Pani Puri: *Filled Crispy Dough Puffs*
Liángbàn Mù'ěr: *Black Fungus Salad*
Liang Fen: *Mung Bean Jelly Noodles*
Pan con Tomate: *Garlic & Tomato Bread*
Kão Fū: *Braised Wheat Gluten*

Sunomono

Cucumber & Seaweed Salad

Japan

In its elegance, *sunomono* encapsulates the very harmony for which Japanese food is so renowned. It's a simple salad, yet it can teach us a great deal about the art of balancing flavors, from sweet to sour, as well as textures, from crunchy to soft.

The name "*sunomono*" refers to vinegar-based dishes generally, and stands as a concept that can be applied to the bounty of any season. This popular version is favored in summer, when cucumbers are paired with *wakame* seaweed, creating a refreshing contrast of land and sea.

ACTIVE TIME 15 minutes
TOTAL TIME 35 minutes
SERVES 2

- 2–3 Japanese or Persian cucumbers, about 9oz (250g)
- 1¼ tsp salt
- 1 tbsp dried wakame
- 1 tbsp sesame seeds
- 2 tbsp rice vinegar
- ½ tsp soy sauce
- 1½ tsp golden caster sugar, or demerara or turbinado refined in a food processor

Thinly slice the cucumbers using a mandolin or your best knife skills. Sprinkle them with 1 teaspoon of the salt, gently massage it in, and set aside for 10 minutes to extract some of the water. Drain, rinse, and squeeze well between your hands to remove as much liquid as possible, then transfer the slices to a large bowl.

Rehydrate the *wakame* for 10 minutes in at least 1¼ cups (300ml) of cold water (or as long as instructed on the packaging), then drain, squeeze out the liquid, and add to the cucumbers. Meanwhile, toast the sesame seeds in a dry pan until golden, then set aside to cool.

Stir together the vinegar, soy sauce, sugar, and remaining ¼ teaspoon salt until the sugar has dissolved. Pour this dressing over the cucumber and *wakame*, add the sesame seeds, and toss with your hands to coat evenly. Refrigerate for at least 15 minutes to let the dressing work its magic, then give it another toss, divide between bowls, and serve.

Sunomono

Nigvziani Badrijani

Eggplant Rolls with Walnut Filling

Georgia

Georgia's rich culinary tradition is often overlooked. This small country on the eastern coast of the Black Sea was an important node on the Silk Road, which explains the similarities it shares with Persian cuisine.

In Georgia, the concept of hospitality is deeply intertwined with its food culture. *Supras* are traditional multicourse feasts that unite families and friends in moments of celebrations, as well as mourning. No *supra* would be complete without these boldly flavored eggplant rolls. They are a great way to take a first bite of the country's culinary heritage.

ACTIVE TIME 1 hour 5 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 30 minutes
SERVES 6–8

- 3 eggplants, about 2lb (900g)
- 1¾ tsp salt
- 5½oz (150g) walnuts
- 3 large garlic cloves
- 1 tsp khmeli suneli (see Note)
- 2 tbsp white wine vinegar
- 6½ tbsp (100ml) vegetable (or olive) oil for frying
- a few sprigs of cilantro
- ¾oz (20g) pomegranate seeds

Trim the eggplants and cut them lengthwise into ¼in (5mm) slices. The outermost slices won't make good rolls but can be fried and eaten as a chef's treat to taste the filling. Season the slices with 1 teaspoon of the salt and place in a colander in the sink to draw out excess moisture (the eggplant will absorb less oil in the pan as a result).

In a small food processor, finely grind the walnuts, peeled garlic, *khmeli suneli*, and remaining ¾ teaspoon salt. Add the vinegar and 6½ tablespoons (100ml) of water, and blend to a spreadable paste.

Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a frying pan and line a cooling rack with paper towel. Pat the eggplant slices dry, then fry them in batches until golden (2–3 minutes each side), adding more oil if the pan runs dry. Transfer to the paper towel–lined rack and continue with the rest. Meanwhile, trim and discard the lower stems of the cilantro, and finely chop the rest.

Once the eggplant slices have cooled a little, pat them again with paper towel to remove the excess oil. Spread a large teaspoon of the walnut mixture over each slice, roll it up, and arrange on a platter. Sprinkle with the chopped cilantro and pomegranate seeds, and serve at room temperature.

Note:
Khmeli suneli *is a Georgian spice mix made with difficult-to-find ingredients including blue fenugreek, summer savory, and ground marigold petals. Good-quality* khmeli suneli *is available online and in specialty spice stores. For a similar flavor, combine* 1/8 *tsp dried dill,* 1/8 *tsp dried marjoram,* 1/8 *tsp dried mint,* 1/8 *tsp dried parsley,* 1/8 *tsp dried tarragon,* 1/8 *tsp ground coriander,* 1/8 *tsp chili powder, and* 1/8 *tsp ground fenugreek.*

Nigvziani Badrijani

Goma Dofu

Sesame Tofu

Japan

The arrival of Buddhism in Japan in the sixth century paved the way for *shōjin ryōri*, a temple cuisine that, in keeping with Buddhist practices, shuns the use of animal ingredients.

Goma dofu is often considered a pinnacle of *shōjin ryōri*. Novice monks would commit to the laborsome process of manually grinding both the sesame paste and the *kuzu* starch. It could take several hours but would teach virtues such as *kansha*, an appreciation for the efforts it takes to produce these foods.

ACTIVE TIME 35 minutes
TOTAL TIME 55 minutes, plus 1 hour refrigerating
SERVES 4

Nerigoma (optional)

- 10oz (300g) sesame seeds
- toasted sesame oil (if needed)

Goma Dofu

- 1¾oz (50g) kuzu starch or cornstarch (see Note)
- 5½oz (150g) nerigoma or tahini
- pinch of salt
- soy sauce, to serve
- wasabi, to serve

To make your own *nerigoma* (Japanese sesame paste), follow the method in the Tahini recipe.

For the *goma dofu*, whisk the *kuzu* starch and 2 cups plus 2 tablespoons (500ml) of water together in a saucepan, then whisk in the *nerigoma* and a pinch of salt. Heat the liquid over medium heat, whisking constantly, until it begins to thicken. Reduce the heat to low, and use a spatula to keep stirring until it has a custard-like consistency, and the spatula leaves a trail on the bottom of the pan. Cook for 5 minutes more, stirring often, then turn off the heat.

Moisten the inside of a 4½ x 4½in (12 x 12cm) tray or mold with water and pour in the mixture. Smooth out the top, tap the mold on a work surface to remove any air bubbles, then drizzle 1 tablespoon of water over the surface to prevent it from drying out. Let it cool for 10 minutes, then refrigerate for 1 hour or until set. You can store it covered in the refrigerator for 3–4 days.

Once set, remove from the mold and cut into equal pieces. To serve, pour a little soy sauce into four serving bowls, add a piece of the *goma dofu*, and garnish it with a touch of wasabi.

Note:
Kuzu *starch is made from the roots of the* kuzu *vine, a plant that grows wild in Japan. Its texture and culinary effect is similar to other starches, but* kuzu *starch is valued for its purity, as it's often untreated.*

Goma Dofu

Pani Puri

Filled Crispy Dough Puffs

India

Meet the original flavor bomb. The moment you bite into these loaded crispy shells, the spicy and tangy *pani* bursts into your mouth, unleashing a mouthful of exciting flavors. They were my favorite street food during my travels through India, where you'd line up next to a hawker stall and receive a course of six, all filled and served one after each other to preserve the crispness of the shell.

The fillings vary, from spiced potatoes to sprouted mung beans, but for me it's the *ragda*, a simple white pea curry, that elevates this bold street food into a more substantial dish—though the biggest joy of eating them is undoubtedly the balance of flavors, mixed to your preference on the spot. Want it spicy? Add some more of the *pani*. You'd like it sweeter? Have a little more of the chutney. It also makes them the perfect appetizer at home, where guests become their own chef, guided by their senses.

Making *puri* from scratch is a bit of a mission. I've included a recipe below, but it takes some practice to get consistent results. If you're entertaining a group, you might want to use premade *puri* disks, available online or in some Indian grocery stores. They only take a few minutes to fry, or can often be microwaved to inflate. Some shops will even sell the puffed-up shells.

ACTIVE TIME 25 minutes, plus 60 minutes if making your own puri
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 50 minutes (without pressure cooker), plus soaking overnight
SERVES 10–12

Ragda

- 5¾oz (160g) dried whole white or yellow peas
- 1 tbsp plus ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp ground turmeric
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- ½ tsp chaat masala
- ¾oz (20g) cilantro

Puri (makes around 40), or use store-bought

- 5½oz (150g) sooji flour (or fine semolina)
- 1oz (30g) all-purpose flour
- ⅛ tsp baking soda
- ¼ tsp salt
- 4⅓ cups (1 liter) vegetable oil for frying

For the *ragda*, soak the peas with 1 tablespoon of salt in around 4⅓ cups (1 liter) of water overnight. The next day, drain and rinse the peas and put them in a large saucepan with the turmeric, oil, and 4⅓ cups (1 liter) of water. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat and simmer, covered, for 1½ hours or until tender. While the peas are cooking, make the Imli Khajoor Chutney.

When the peas are tender, use a potato masher to break down one-quarter of the peas, which will thicken the curry. Stir in the *chaat masala* and remaining ½ teaspoon of salt, and cook uncovered for 10 minutes more until creamy. Trim and discard the lower stems of the cilantro, finely chop the rest and stir most of it through the cooked peas, reserving a little for garnishing. The *ragda* will thicken as it cools down.

To make your own *puri*, whisk together the dry ingredients, add 6 tablespoons (90ml) of warm water, and mix to a stiff dough. Knead for 4–5 minutes on a work surface until it stretches rather than tears, then transfer to a bowl, cover with a damp towel, and let rest for at least 30 minutes.

Pani

- 1¾oz (50g) mint
- 1¾oz (50g) cilantro
- 1oz (30g) fresh root ginger
- 4 green finger chiles
- 1oz (30g) seedless tamarind or 1oz (30g) tamarind paste
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp chaat masala
- ¼ tsp asafetida
- ½ tsp black salt (or ½ tsp more sea salt)
- ½ tsp salt
- a handful of ice cubes

To serve

- 1 x Imli Khajoor Chutney

Meanwhile, make the *pani*. Pick the mint leaves, trim and discard the lower stems of the cilantro, and roughly chop the rest; peel the ginger and trim the chiles. Put everything in the jug of a blender along with the tamarind, cumin, *chaat masala*, asafetida, black salt, salt, and 1 scant cup (200ml) of cold water. Blend until smooth, then transfer to a bowl with another 2 cups plus 2 tablespoons (500ml) of cold water (use this to rinse the blender first). Stir and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

To fry the *puri*, heat the oil in a wide pan to 390°F (200°C) and line a cooling rack with paper towel. Divide the dough into four equal pieces, keeping three covered with a kitchen towel, and roll one piece into a thin 8in (20cm) circle. Cut out 2in (5cm) circles using a cookie cutter and set the excess dough aside under the towel. The circles will contract slightly around the edges, so lightly roll over them with a rolling pin to even them out, then carefully add them to the hot oil and fry until they puff up, gently pressing them down with a slotted spoon. Continue frying for around 30 seconds on each side until golden, then transfer to the paper towel and continue with the rest, including the excess dough. If using store-bought *puri* disks, follow the packaging instructions.

Before serving, reheat the *ragda* with a splash of water, then transfer to a bowl and garnish with the remaining cilantro. Add the ice cubes to the chilled *pani*.

To assemble your *pani puri*, use your finger to break a hole in the surface of each *puri* and fill to your preference. My favorite ratio is 1 teaspoon of the warm *ragda*, followed by ½ teaspoon of the chutney and enough *pani* to fill the rest of the *puri* (1–2 tablespoons). Eat immediately before assembling the next one.

Notes:

- ⚫ *To make the* ragda *in a pressure cooker (see Cooking legumes in a pressure cooker), cook the soaked peas with the turmeric, oil, ½ teaspoon of salt, and just 1½ cups (350ml) of water for around 14 minutes. Then stir in the* chaat masala *and chopped cilantro, without simmering it any longer.*
- ⚫ *You can store the cooled* puri *in an airtight container for 1–2 weeks.*

Pani Puri

Liángbàn Mù'ěr

Black Fungus Salad

China

The first time I tasted black fungus wasn't in the dimly lit backstreets of a small town in China, but in London, at a tiny eatery called Xi'an Impression, across the road from the Emirates Stadium. I was instantly captivated by its simplicity—the strangely satisfying texture of the mushrooms mingling with the pungent flavors of raw garlic, chile, soy sauce, and black vinegar. Since then, I've come to realize that this dish exemplifies the artful preparation of harmonious flavors in Chinese cuisine.

Recreating *liángbàn mù'ěr* at home is remarkably easy, thanks to the accessibility of the ingredients in most Asian stores. "Black fungus" refers to a group of dark mushrooms found across Asian woodlands, but a crucial distinction lies between two types: cloud ear mushrooms and wood ear mushrooms, both named after their tubular, earlike shape. Cloud ear mushrooms, smaller and more tender, are the preferred choice for this salad. Beyond culinary uses, they are also hailed for their medicinal benefits, since they are said to promote blood circulation and aid digestion.

ACTIVE TIME 15 minutes
TOTAL TIME 45 minutes, plus 2 hours soaking
SERVES 2 as a starter or side

- scant 1oz (25g) dried cloud ear mushrooms (black fungus)
- 1 garlic clove
- 1 long red chile
- 1½ tbsp Chinese black vinegar (Chinkiang), plus extra if needed
- 2 tbsp light soy sauce, plus extra if needed
- 1 tsp golden caster sugar, or demerara or turbinado refined in a food processor
- 1 tsp toasted sesame oil
- ¾oz (20g) cilantro

Soak the mushrooms in at least 4⅓ cups (1 liter) of water for 2 hours.

Bring a pan of water to a boil. Meanwhile, peel and finely grate or crush the garlic, and thinly slice the chile. Put both into a small bowl with the black vinegar, soy sauce, sugar, and sesame oil. Trim and discard the lower stems of the cilantro, roughly chop the rest, and set aside.

Drain the mushrooms and add them to the pan of water. Return to a boil and cook for 5 minutes, then drain and rinse under cold water. Dry them in a salad spinner or on a clean kitchen towel.

Transfer the mushrooms to a large mixing bowl along with the dressing and cilantro. Mix to coat evenly, then refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.

Give it a good toss before tasting and adjusting the seasoning with soy sauce and black vinegar if needed. Divide between bowls, and serve.

Liángbàn Mù'ěr

Liang Fen

Mung Bean Jelly Noodles

China

On a hot, humid day in northern Sichuan, people turn to a bowl of *liang fen* for a street-food remedy to the heat. Served fridge-cold, the refreshing noodles stand in addictive contrast to the fiery dressing—and the spiciness of chiles helps to cool the body down as it induces sweating. The noodles consist of almost 90 percent water, so this dish makes a light snack that awakens the senses and leaves you with a tingling tongue from the Sichuan pepper—a sensory experience that showcases the complexity and balance of Sichuan food.

The noodles are quick to make but take a long time to set, so it's best to prepare them a day ahead or first thing in the morning. To cut the slippery noodles, street-food vendors use a jelly scraper, a circular metal disk with holes, but you can simply use a knife and cut the set starch into strips the thickness of scallions.

ACTIVE TIME 30 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 20 minutes, plus 4 hours setting
SERVES 4

- 5oz (140g) mung bean starch
- ½ tsp Sichuan peppercorns
- 4 tbsp light soy sauce
- 4 tbsp Chinese black vinegar (Chinkiang)
- 2 tsp toasted sesame oil
- 2 tsp golden granulated sugar
- 4 garlic cloves
- 4 scallions
- 2 tbsp sesame seeds
- 4 tbsp Sichuan chili oil

Bring 4⅔ cups (1.1 liters) of water to a boil, then reduce to a simmer. Meanwhile, whisk together the mung bean starch and 1 cup plus 1 tablespoon (250ml) of cold water until fully dissolved, then slowly whisk it into the simmering water. Stir with a spoon as the mixture turns translucent and eventually reaches the consistency of a thick sauce (1–2 minutes). When it's ready, it will form thick ripples on the surface when you drizzle it from the spoon. Pour the paste into a rectangular container that holds around 6¼ cups (1.5 liters), let it set to a jelly for at least 4 hours, then transfer to the refrigerator until needed.

Toast the Sichuan peppercorns in a dry pan until aromatic, grind them to a fine powder using a pestle and mortar, and transfer to a bowl. Mix in the soy sauce, vinegar, sesame oil, and sugar, then peel and grate or crush in the garlic. Finally, stir in 1 cup (200ml) of cold water. Refrigerate the sauce for at least 30 minutes. Meanwhile, thinly slice the scallions and toast the sesame seeds until they turn golden.

Tip the jelly onto a plate, coat it with cold water, and use a jelly scraper or knife to cut the noodles.

Divide the noodles between four bowls. Pour the sauce over the noodles, drizzle over the chili oil, then scatter the sliced scallions and toasted sesame seeds on top. Serve cold.

Liang Fen

Pan con Tomate

Garlic & Tomato Bread

Spain

What started as a way of reviving stale bread with the juices of ripe tomatoes soon became one of Spain's most iconic breakfasts. As straightforward as the recipe may seem, *pan con tomate* is the subject of heated dispute. Catalans consider their version, *pa amb tomàquet*, to be the original, and the recipe is held sacred. They swear by a specific tomato variety that is simply crushed by hand and rubbed directly over the toasted bread. Andalusians give it their own twist by first grating the tomatoes, a method that I find guarantees success no matter which variety of tomato you choose.

Despite the differences, one rule stands firm: *pan con tomate* needs to be eaten the moment the tomato hits the bread. That's why, when I serve this as an appetizer, I prefer to place the garlic-rubbed slices, seasoned tomatoes, and extra virgin olive oil on the table, and let guests assemble their own burst of pure summer flavors right before tucking in.

ACTIVE TIME 15 minutes
TOTAL TIME 15 minutes
SERVES 4 as an appetizer or 2 as a light meal

- 2–4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 4 slices crusty country bread
- 2 large ripe tomatoes, about 14oz (400g) in total
- ⅓ tsp salt
- 1 large garlic clove

Heat 2 tablespoons of the olive oil over medium heat in a heavy-based pan and fry the bread in the oil until golden on both sides (1–2 minutes per side). You might need to do this in two batches, adding another 2 tablespoons of oil for the next slices. Alternatively, grill or toast the bread until golden, then drizzle with a little oil.

Meanwhile, cut the tomatoes in half and finely grate the flesh into a shallow bowl, starting with the cut side, so that only the skin remains. If the pulp is watery, strain some of the juices through a fine sieve (they're delicious to drink!), then return the pulp to the bowl, season with the salt, and give it a stir.

Peel and halve the garlic clove. Rub it generously over the warm, toasted bread, especially over the edges and crispy bits where the garlic will catch. There should be hardly any garlic left when you are finished.

To serve, either assemble now or let guests do it themselves by placing the garlic-rubbed bread, grated tomato, and a bottle of good olive oil on the table. Spread the grated tomato over a slice of bread, drizzle with a generous glug of the oil, and eat immediately.

Note:
Traditionally, the bread is toasted without oil, but I love the scrumptiousness it adds to every bite.

Pan con Tomate

Kǎo Fū

Braised Wheat Gluten

China

Kǎo fū is not only the name of this Shanghainese dish, but also of the wheat gluten that takes center stage, one of the earliest forms of mock meat. It dates back as far as the sixth century, when it was most likely invented by Chinese Buddhist monks. Following a vegetarian diet, they explored ways to offer meat-like textures to visitors who ate at the monastery. One of those ways was by rinsing wheat dough in water, which removed the starches and left behind the spongy gluten structure that, once simmered, had a pleasant chewiness.

Today, wheat gluten, most often known by its Japanese name "seitan," is hailed for its texture, high protein content, and its ability to absorb the flavors of whatever it is cooked with. Traditional *kǎo fū* differs from shop-bought seitan, which tends to be dense in texture. Instead, look out for "dried roasted wheat gluten" that is sold in cubes and has a spongy appearance. Find it in larger Chinese supermarkets or from online suppliers.

ACTIVE TIME 35 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 35 minutes, plus 2 hours soaking
SERVES 4 as an appetizer or as a main with rice

- 5¾oz (160g) dried roasted wheat gluten (kǎo fū)
- 1½oz (40g) dried shiitake mushrooms
- 1oz (30g) dried wood ear mushrooms (black fungus)
- scant 1oz (25g) dried lily flowers
- 2¼oz (70g) raw skinless peanuts
- 2oz (60g) fresh root ginger
- 4 tbsp vegetable oil
- 8oz (225g) can bamboo shoots, drained
- 4 tbsp light soy sauce
- 2 tbsp dark soy sauce
- 2 tbsp Shaoxing wine
- 1 tbsp golden granulated sugar
- 1 tbsp toasted sesame oil

Soak the wheat gluten in a bowl with about 5 cups plus 4½ tablespoons (1.25 liters) of water for 2 hours.

In a separate bowl, soak both types of dried mushrooms, the dried lily flowers, and peanuts with the same amount of water for the same time.

Drain and rinse the gluten, then squeeze out and discard as much water as possible; set aside. Strain the contents of the other bowl but reserve the soaking liquid. If the wood ear mushrooms are quite large, tear them into bite-sized pieces and discard any tough, knobbly bits.

Finely julienne the ginger. Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a large nonstick frying pan or seasoned wok for which you have a lid, and fry the ginger and bamboo shoots until the ginger begins to turn golden (6–8 minutes). Add the soaked ingredients (except the gluten) and fry for 2 minutes more. Set aside.

Add the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil to the pan and fry the gluten, turning it once, until golden on two sides (5–6 minutes). Return the cooked ingredients and pour in the light soy sauce, dark soy sauce, the Shaoxing wine, the sugar, and 3 cups plus 2 tablespoons (750ml) of the reserved soaking liquid. Give it a stir, bring to a boil, then cover and simmer for 30 minutes. Remove the lid and cook for 30 minutes more, stirring occasionally, until almost all of the liquid has evaporated. If you're serving it with rice, cook the rice in the meantime.

Turn off the heat and stir in the sesame oil. Serve straightaway, or following tradition, as a cold appetizer.

Kăo Fū

Legumes

The oldest known collection of recipes, the fifth-century CE Roman *De Re Culinaria* (*The Art of Cooking*), proudly dedicates an entire section solely to legumes. The Romans weren't alone in their appreciation. Phoenicians, Egyptians, and Ancient Greeks all relied on legumes in their diets, often pairing them with cereal grains for a substantial meal. Numerous recipes in my book honor this historic combination of legumes and grains, showcasing a legacy that sustained these early civilizations (see Whole Meals).

The history of legumes can be traced back even further. They first cropped up more than 10,000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent, a region stretching from modern-day Egypt through Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq. The earliest farming communities already recognized the agricultural power of legumes, and planted them alongside staple crops such as wheat, barley, and oats. As they spread across regions and cultures, adapting to the differing climates, legumes became cornerstones of local culinary traditions, evolving into an immense diversity, of which our current commercial agricultural system barely scratches the surface.

A stroll around Slow Food's Terra Madre Salone del Gusto, the world's largest food-sustainability event, held every two years in Torino, Italy, would leave you in awe of the sheer number of legume varieties, as well as their lyrical English names. There are Polish eagle beans (so called for the red eagle-shaped markings on each legume), Mexican *mantequilla* beans, Lesothan zebra beans, Kenyan black cowpeas, Japanese rockwell beans, Chinese pink tiger stripe beans, Malawian *bambara* nuts (also a legume), Philippine pigeon peas, and German *margarethe* peas to name just a few. All of these play an important role in their local ecosystems.

Legumes have stood out since the earliest days of agriculture because of their ability to fix nitrogen in the soil. Today, we know that this ability is down to a fascinating partnership. Nitrogen, vital to our existence, is in the air all around us, but neither mammals nor plants can directly access it that way. While we obtain nitrogen through the food we eat, plants access it from deep within the soil. Legumes have found a better way. Through special nodules in their roots, they release certain compounds into the soil that attract a bacterium called *Rhizobia*. It's the beginning of a symbiotic relationship. The plant feeds sugars and minerals to the *Rhizobia*, which return the favor by absorbing nitrogen from the air and converting it into ammonia, a natural fertilizer for plants.

In modern farming, this ability to fix and store nitrogen reduces the need for synthetic fertilizers. That's why legumes are often used as rotation crops in biodiverse systems, where they restore soil health after a harvest of nitrogen-depleting crops. And that's only the beginning. Their particularly dense root systems act like highways, transporting nutrients to other plants and creating complex structures which help retain water and prevent soil erosion, thereby minimizing two of the major problems facing our farms today. They also provide natural pest control and act as a habitat, as well as a food source, for insects and organisms that are all essential in a balanced ecosystem. It's a humbling thought that every time you eat a legume, you support such a powerful cycle.

But legumes are more than environmental benefactors. They are alive. Soak them overnight, leave well drained for 1–2 days, and soon you'll notice tiny sprouts shooting from each pod. Imagine the complexity at play, that something can lie dormant for so long and suddenly burst into life after being exposed to nothing but water and air. It's therefore not surprising that legumes have long been hailed for their nutritional benefits. Lowering cholesterol levels, improving heart health, stabilizing blood-sugar levels, nourishing beneficial gut bacteria, and reducing inflammation are some of the properties for which legumes are celebrated. Together with nuts and seeds, they are ideal sources of plant-based proteins. Add to that an abundance of vitamins and minerals, and it's easy to understand why legumes have played such a crucial role in our human trajectory.

Considering all this, it might come as a surprise that most legumes in their raw state are actually toxic. As a defense mechanism against natural predators, legumes have developed potentially harmful plant toxins such as lectins. Luckily, humans have found that soaking and cooking legumes breaks down those toxins, and makes them safe to consume.

From a culinary perspective, legumes are incredibly exciting. Some contain natural yeasts, which can be harnessed to ferment batters, such as for the fluffy, steamed rice and lentil cakes called *idli*. Most are rich in starches that, once broken down into a flour, mixed with water and heated, can coagulate into a semisolid structure (see Shan Tofu). Other legumes, including soybeans, even curdle when heated with

something acidic, forming the basis for traditional tofu. But most of the time, legumes are simply cooked whole to add sustenance to dishes from all around the world. For a guide on how to cook them from scratch, using a normal pan or a pressure cooker.

5e5: *Chickpea Pancake Sandwich*
Fakes: *Lentil Soup*
Kuru Börülce Salatası: *Black-Eyed Bean Salad*
Kuru Fasulye: *White Bean Stew*
Maharagwe: *Spiced Kidney Bean Coconut Stew*
Falafel: *Chickpea Fritters*
Khoresh Bademjan: *Eggplant Stew*
Rummaniyeh: *Eggplant & Lentil Stew*
Maghmour: *Eggplant & Chickpea Moussaka*
Tahu Tempe Bacem: *Braised Tofu & Tempeh*
Besan Chilla: *Chickpea Pancakes*
Chana Masala: *Chickpea Curry*
Moong Dal: *Tempered Split Mung Beans*
Shan Tofu: *Burmese Chickpea Tofu*
Tohu Thoke: *Burmese Tofu Salad*
Suan La Fen: *Hot & Sour Noodle Soup*

5e5

Chickpea Pancake Sandwich

Italy

At the heart of 5e5 is a centuries-old recipe that goes by many names. It's known as *farinata* in Genoa, *cecina* in Pisa, and *torta di ceci* in Livorno.

At Da Gagarin, a small *torteria* opposite Livorno's *Mercato Centrale*, Giuliano Chiappa fills round copper trays with the liquid chickpea batter and pushes them into the burning inferno of his wood-fired oven. The golden cakes that emerge are crispy on the outside yet creamy within. When eaten as a sandwich, this satisfying snack becomes a "5e5" (*cinque e cinque*), a name that dates back to when 5 *lire* worth of torta was packed into 5 *lire* worth of focaccia, with the optional addition of grilled eggplants. Freshly ground pepper is essential.

ACTIVE TIME 40 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 25 minutes, plus 4 hours resting
SERVES 2

- heaped 3/4 cup (100g) chickpea flour
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 4 tbsp olive oil
- freshly ground black pepper
- focaccia, to serve

Grilled Eggplant (optional)

- 1 large eggplant, about 14oz (400g) in total
- 1 tsp salt
- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for brushing
- 1 tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1 heaped tsp dried oregano
- 1 garlic clove

Put the chickpea flour, 1 1/4 cups (300ml) of water, and salt in a bowl. Whisk for a few seconds to remove lumps. Cover with a plate and let it rest for at least 4 hours (and up to 8), which will give the batter a homogeneous texture.

Meanwhile, cut the eggplant, if using, into long slices, 1/4in (5mm) thick, add the salt, and drain in a colander for 30 minutes. In a separate bowl, mix the olive oil, vinegar, and oregano, then peel and finely grate or crush in the garlic to make a dressing.

Pat the eggplant slices dry between pieces of paper towel, and brush them with a little olive oil. Heat a griddle pan over medium-high heat. When hot, add the eggplant slices and cook until charred (2–3 minutes each side). Alternatively, roast at 425°F (220°C) for 20 minutes or until lightly golden. Add the

warm eggplant slices to the dressing and use a spoon to coat them evenly. Refrigerate until needed.

To make the *torta di ceci*, preheat the oven to 480°F (250°C) with a 12in (30cm) cast-iron (or heavy-based) ovenproof pan inside. Once hot, use a spoon to skim off any foam from the surface of the batter, then give it a stir. Transfer the batter to a jug (to make it easier to pour) and stir in 2 tablespoons of the oil.

Carefully remove the pan from the oven and place it over high heat on the stovetop. Add the remaining oil and swirl the pan to spread it evenly. Heat for 5–10 seconds until it just begins to smoke—it needs to be piping hot or the batter will stick. Pour the batter over the back of a wooden spoon (to prevent splashing) into the pan, give it a shake, and return it to the oven. Bake for 20 minutes, or until golden, then remove and let it rest for a minute. Carefully loosen the *torta* and slide it out of the pan, sprinkle generously with pepper, and cut into eight slices. Sandwich the slices between focaccia, layered with the grilled eggplants, if using.

5e5

Fakes

Lentil Soup

Greece

As I was selecting the recipes for this book, it dawned on me that many of them really are about the art of mastering basics. Here I was, researching recipes from around the world that have sustained civilizations throughout human history. I was awed by the ancestral wisdom that has been passed from one generation to the next, so it was never about adding my own touch but about finding the most flavorsome expression of these foods. And when it came to the art of cooking lentils, *fakes* reigned supreme.

At first sight, it's not much else than water, lentils, and vegetables. But taste it, and you'd suspect it had been cooked for hours in a giant cast-iron cauldron, hung over stacks of burning logs. The secret lies in its simplicity. The addition of tomato paste means the dish requires longer cooking, which allows plenty of time to coax out flavors that would otherwise be unattainable, and are balanced only with a dash of red wine vinegar. It's a culinary ace up your sleeve—the foundation to transforming lentils into a bowl of comfort, which begs to be scooped up with warm, crusty bread.

ACTIVE TIME 30 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 10 minutes
SERVES 4 with bread

- 1lb 2oz (500g) brown lentils
- 6 tbsp (90ml) extra virgin olive oil, plus extra to serve
- 1 large onion, about 7oz (200g)
- 1 large carrot, about 4½oz (125g)
- 1 celery stalk
- 3 large garlic cloves
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 2 bay leaves
- 1½ tbsp salt
- ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tbsp red wine vinegar

Cover the lentils with boiling water, and set aside while you prepare and cook the ingredients. Soaking the lentils will make them easier to digest.

Heat 4 tablespoons of the oil in a casserole over medium-low heat. Peel the onion and finely cube along with the carrot and celery, adding to the casserole as you go. Sauté until the onion has softened (8–10 minutes), then peel and finely grate or crush in the garlic, and cook for 1 minute more until the raw scent has disappeared.

Stir in the tomato paste, then drain the lentils, rinse them, and add to the casserole along with the bay leaves and 6¼ cups (1.5 liters) of water. Bring to a boil, then simmer, covered, for 30 minutes, or until the lentils are tender and the soup has thickened slightly. Add the salt and black pepper, cook for 10 minutes more, then stir in the vinegar and the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Divide the soup among bowls, and serve with a final drizzle of oil.

Fakes

Kuru Börülce Salatası

Black-Eyed Bean Salad

Türkiye

Turkish food is renowned for its use of fragrant herbs, tangy pickles, and punchy spices such as sumac. *Kuru börülce salatası* combines them all. It's a refreshing burst of flavor, and you will often find it in traditional *esnaf lokantaları*, casual "tradesmen's restaurants" offering a wide range of naturally plant-based dishes (see Kısır).

Whether it's served as part of a varied *lokanta*-style lunch, or simply as a main by itself, preparing this dish from scratch will teach you the invaluable skills for transforming simply cooked beans into an enticing salad that will make your taste buds sing.

ACTIVE TIME 30 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 55 minutes (without pressure cooker), plus soaking overnight
SERVES 4 with bread

- 11oz (320g) dried black-eyed beans, or 2 x 1¼lb (570g) jars, or 3 x 14oz (400g) cans (see Note)
- 3½ tbsp salt
- 2¾oz (80g) parsley
- scant 1oz (25g) dill
- 8 scallions
- 1 large red bell pepper, about 7oz (200g)
- 2¾oz (80g) pickled cucumbers or cornichons
- 6 tbsp (90ml) extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 2 tbsp pomegranate molasses
- 1 tbsp sumac

Soak the dried beans with 1½ tablespoons of salt in about 6¼ cups (1.5 liters) of water overnight.

The next day, drain the beans and put them in a large pan (for which you have a lid), adding 8½ cups (2 liters) of water. Bring to a boil, then simmer partially covered for 1 hour or until tender. Add 1½ tablespoons of the salt, simmer for 10 minutes, then drain and set aside to cool for at least 30 minutes. Alternatively, cook with 1 tablespoon of salt and 4⅓ cups (1 liter) of water for about 8 minutes in a pressure cooker (see Cooking legumes in a pressure cooker).

Meanwhile, prepare the herbs and vegetables: trim the lower stems from the parsley and dill, and finely chop the rest; finely chop the scallions; and cube the pepper and pickled cucumbers. Put them along with the remaining ingredients, including the ½ tablespoon of salt, in a large bowl. When the beans have

cooled to room temperature, tip them into the bowl, and use your hands to toss everything well before serving.

Note:
If using jarred or canned beans, see Using canned/jarred legumes and simply add them at the final stage of the recipe.

Kuru Börülce Salatası

Kuru Fasulye

White Bean Stew

Türkiye

Right across from İstanbul's Süleymaniye Mosque, you'll find a row of small, street-side restaurants. Tucked away in the domed *medreses* that once housed the mosque's schools, they share a common dedication—the preparation of one of the city's most renowned dishes, *kuru fasulye*.

Here, at Kuru Fasulyeci Ali Baba (literally "Ali Baba's Bean Shop"), I first learned how to cook this humble dish from scratch, closely watching as chef Gökhan Güzel submerged buckets of soaked white beans in a fiery-red broth. Rather than simply simmering beans in water until they're tender, cooking them in the broth means that you're left with a thick, spicy sauce by the time they're finished. It's an ingenious method that results in a rich plate of slow-cooked comfort food, so popular that it is often considered Türkiye's national dish.

Serve it with Şehriyeli Pilav and Turşu.

ACTIVE TIME 30 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 55 minutes (without pressure cooker), plus soaking overnight
SERVES 4 with rice

- 11oz (320g) dried navy beans
- 2¼ tbsp salt
- 6½ tbsp (100ml) extra virgin olive oil
- 2 large onions, about 14oz (400g) in total
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 2 tbsp tatlı biber salçası (Turkish mild red pepper paste)
- ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 5 dried red chiles (or ½ tsp chili powder)
- 1 Turkish green pepper

Soak the beans with 1½ tablespoons of the salt in around 6¼ cups (1.5 liters) of water overnight.

The next day, heat the oil in a casserole over medium heat. Peel and roughly chop the onions, then sauté them until they begin to turn golden (8–10 minutes). Stir in the tomato paste, pepper paste, and black pepper, and continue frying until the oil has turned bright red.

Carefully pour in 4⅔ cups (1.1 liters) of fresh water, then drain and rinse the beans and add to the casserole as well. Trim the chiles and green pepper, cut the green pepper into chunks, and add both to the casserole. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer, covered, for 1 hour 15 minutes, or until the beans are tender, stirring occasionally. If necessary, add more water throughout, but you want to have a creamy stock by the end, which isn't too diluted. You can now also cook the rice, if using.

Season the stew with the remaining ¾ tablespoon of salt and continue cooking for 10 minutes more. Divide among plates, and serve with rice and pickles.

Note:

To use a pressure cooker (see Cooking legumes in a pressure cooker), follow the same steps, but add 2½ cups (600ml) of water along with the ¾ tablespoon of salt, and cook for around 10 minutes.

Kuru Fasulye

Maharagwe

Spiced Kidney Bean Coconut Stew

Kenya

The Swahili Coast stretches across the eastern edge of Africa, from Somalia in the north to Mozambique in the south. Taking part in the Indian Ocean trade from the eighth century, Swahili traders exchanged goods with merchants from the Arab world, Persia, India, and China, thereby vastly influencing the coastline's food culture. This is how many of the spices and cooking methods that we associate with Indian cuisine first arrived in Kenya.

Pair this with the abundance of coconuts along the coast and one of Kenya's staple legumes, kidney beans, and you've laid the groundwork for *maharagwe*. It's delicious with rice or flatbreads, but for the most popular pairing try it with Ugali, which is often deemed Kenya's national dish.

ACTIVE TIME 40 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 55 minutes
SERVES 4 with ugali

- 11oz (320g) red kidney beans, or or 2 x 1¼lb (570g) jars, or 3 x 14oz (400g) cans (see Note)
- 2½ tbsp salt
- 3 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 large red onion, about 7oz (200g)
- 4 large garlic cloves
- 1oz (30g) fresh root ginger
- 2 green finger chiles
- 1oz (30g) cilantro
- 2 large tomatoes, about 10oz (300g) in total
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- ½ tsp ground turmeric
- ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 14fl oz (400ml) can coconut milk

Soak the beans with 1½ tablespoons of salt in around 6¼ cups (1.5 liters) of water overnight. The next day, drain and rinse the beans, and put them in a large pan with 8½ cups (2 liters) of water. Bring to a boil, skim off any foam, then reduce the heat and simmer, with a lid left slightly ajar, for 1 hour or until tender. Drain and set aside. Alternatively, cook with 4⅓ cups (1 liter) of water for around 10 minutes in a pressure cooker (see Cooking legumes in a pressure cooker).

When the beans have around 30 minutes left to cook, heat the oil in a large casserole over low heat. Peel and finely chop the onion, and sauté until it begins to turn golden (10–12 minutes). Meanwhile, peel and finely grate the garlic and ginger; finely slice the green chiles; strip the leaves of the cilantro, set aside, and finely chop the stems; and cube the tomatoes.

Add the garlic, ginger, chiles, and cilantro stems to the casserole, and cook for 1 minute more until aromatic. Tip in the cubed tomatoes along with the tomato paste, and cook, covered, until the tomatoes have softened (8–10 minutes). Stir in the spices, let them heat through, then add the beans, the remaining 1 tablespoon of salt, and the coconut milk. Return to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer, covered, for 30 minutes, stirring halfway through. Meanwhile, roughly chop the cilantro leaves. Cook the *ugali* or rice, if using.

Turn off the heat, stir in the chopped cilantro leaves, and let it rest uncovered for 10 minutes, during which time it will thicken a little more. Divide the stew among bowls, and serve.

Note:
If using jarred or canned beans, see Using canned/jarred legumes and add to the casserole after the spices as described here.

Maharagwe

Falafel

Chickpea Fritters

Levant

Pack them into a Pita, dip them into Tahini Sauce or snack on them alongside some crunchy veg—falafel rarely disappoint. They are believed to have originated in Egypt, where Coptic Christians, who abstained from meat during Lent, turned fava beans into *ta'amiyah* for a hearty snack. Since then they have spread throughout the Levant, where regional differences mean that chickpeas, herbs, and spices became unmissable expressions of this staple food.

To make crispy, light falafel, you don't need to use flour or baking soda because soaked but uncooked legumes already contain enough starches. The trick is to grind them finely enough to hold their shape, yet retain some coarseness for a light mouthfeel. It requires a little practice, but I still remember the triumphant feeling when the first golden-brown falafel emerged from the hot oil—the sweet fruit of learning a new skill.

ACTIVE TIME 45 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour, plus soaking overnight
MAKES 18–20

- 7oz (200g) dried chickpeas
- 1 small onion, about 2¾oz (80g)
- 5 large garlic cloves
- 1 long green chile
- 1¾oz (50g) cilantro
- 1¾oz (50g) parsley
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- 4⅓ cups (1 liter) vegetable oil
- Tahini Sauce, to serve

Soak the chickpeas in at least 4⅓ cups (1 liter) water overnight. The next day, rinse them and drain well, then blend them in a small food processor to a fine mixture, scraping down the sides occasionally (I usually do this in two batches). The mixture should feel sticky and hold its shape when you squeeze it. Transfer to a large bowl and set aside.

Peel and roughly chop the onion and garlic, trim and chop the chile, twist off the leafy bits of the cilantro and parsley (make sure the herbs are well dried so they don't water down the mixture), and add all of this to the food processor along with the salt. Pulse until finely chopped.

Transfer the chopped aromatics to the bowl with the chickpea mixture, add the spices, and use your hands to mix it well. Refrigerate for at least 15 minutes.

Heat the vegetable oil to 340°F (170°C) in a large, heavy-based saucepan (if you don't have a thermometer, place the tip of a wooden spoon into the hot oil; tiny, rapid bubbles should form around the wood when it's hot enough). Meanwhile, cover a cooling rack with paper towel. Moisten your hands and shape the mixture into 18–20 falafel balls, around 1oz (30g) each.

Fry 4–5 balls at a time until they are crispy and golden brown (3–4 minutes). Remove with a slotted spoon, transfer them onto the paper towel to drain the excess oil, then continue with the rest. Serve the warm falafel simply dipped into the Tahini Sauce.

Note:
Chickpeas and fava beans are the most commonly used, but you can make falafel with most legumes following the same method.

Falafel

Khoresh Bademjan

Eggplant Stew

Iran

Many know this dish as a stew of eggplants and lamb. Over time (and by necessity; meat being expensive), some cooks focused on using yellow split peas instead. The distinctive flavor of black limes and the careful frying of the eggplants, cooked until dark golden and extremely moreish, make this a celebration of the Persian kitchen. Serve with freshly steamed Basmati Rice.

ACTIVE TIME 1 hour 10 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 30 minutes, plus soaking overnight
SERVES 4 with rice

- 7oz (200g) yellow split peas
- 3 tbsp salt
- 1 pinch of saffron
- 1 ice cube
- 4 Persian long eggplants, about 2–2¼lb (900g–1kg) in total, or 3–4 globe eggplants
- ⅔ cup (140ml) extra virgin olive oil
- 1 large onion, about 7oz (200g)
- 4 garlic cloves
- 1 tsp ground turmeric
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- ¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 14oz (400g) can chopped tomatoes
- 4 dried black limes, or 2 preserved lemons, seeds removed, and roughly chopped

Soak the split peas with 1 tablespoon of the salt in around 4⅓ cups (1 liter) of water overnight. The next day, drain and rinse the split peas, put them in a large lidded saucepan with 4⅓ cups (1 liter) of water, and bring to a boil. Skim off any foam from the surface, reduce the heat and simmer, with the lid ajar, for 20 minutes or until tender. Strain, reserving the cooking liquid.

Meanwhile, grind the saffron into a fine powder in a mortar and pestle, then place the ice cube on top, and let it melt (the traditional way to "bloom" saffron to draw out the most flavor and color).

Peel half of the eggplants (I like to keep some skin on for extra fiber), then cut all of them in half crossways and again in half lengthways, resulting in four chunks per eggplant (if using globe eggplants, cut them into ⅔–¾in 1.5–2cm thick slices). Season with 1 tablespoon of the salt, then place them in a colander in the sink to drain some of their moisture and bitter flavors.

Meanwhile, heat 3 tablespoons of the oil in a casserole over medium heat. Peel and roughly chop the onion, and sauté until lightly golden (10–12 minutes). Add the remaining 1 tablespoon of salt, peel and finely grate or crush in the garlic, and cook until the garlic loses its raw scent. Stir in the turmeric, cinnamon, and black pepper, followed by the tomato paste and chopped tomatoes. Pierce the dried limes and add them to the casserole, along with the parboiled split peas, the bloomed saffron, and 1¾ cups (400ml) of the reserved split-pea cooking liquid. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer, covered, for 30 minutes, stirring now and then. If serving rice alongside, cook it now.

Heat 3 more tablespoons of the oil in a nonstick frying pan and line two plates with paper towel. Pat the eggplant pieces dry, then fry them in batches until golden on each side (3–5 minutes per side). Transfer to the lined plates and continue with the rest, using more oil when needed.

Gently press the cooked eggplant pieces into the stew, then leave the lid ajar and simmer for 20 minutes more, until the liquid has reduced to a thick sauce. Divide the stew among plates, removing the black limes, and serve.

Note:
To roast the eggplants in the oven, drizzle the chunks with a little olive oil, season with 1 teaspoon of salt, and roast at 425°F 220°C for 30 minutes or until golden.

Khoresh Bademjan

Rummaniyeh

Eggplant & Lentil Stew

Palestine

Rummaniyeh is said to have originated in the city of Jaffa in historical Palestine. "*Rumman*" translates to "pomegranate" and this dish really is a celebration of this jewellike fruit. Sour varieties are usually juiced and added to the dish, giving it its distinctive flavor. Because it can be difficult to find the sour pomegranates outside of the Levant, you can use the less-sour ones and add some pomegranate molasses as described here. It's a hearty stew that, thanks to the simple addition of flour, has a velvety, creamy texture that begs to be scooped up with a warm flatbread.

ACTIVE TIME 30 minutes
TOTAL TIME 55 minutes
SERVES 4 with flatbread

- 7 tbsp (105ml) extra virgin olive oil, plus extra to serve
- 1 large onion, about 7oz (200g)
- 11oz (320g) brown lentils
- 2 large eggplants, about 1 3/4lb (800g) in total
- 1 tbsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- 1 tbsp salt
- 1 1/4 cups (300ml) pomegranate juice (see Note)
- 1 tbsp all-purpose or bread flour
- 2 tbsp tahini
- 1–2 tbsp pomegranate molasses (optional)
- 6 large garlic cloves
- 1 green chile
- 1oz (30g) parsley
- 3 1/2oz (100g) pomegranate seeds (see Note)

Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil over medium-low heat in a large lidded saucepan. Peel and finely chop the onion, then sauté until translucent (8–10 minutes). Rinse the lentils, and add them to the pan with (4 cups minus 3 tablespoons (900ml) of water. Bring to a boil, then turn down the heat and simmer, covered, for 10 minutes, or until the lentils begin to soften. Meanwhile, cut the eggplants into bite-sized cubes.

Stir the cumin, coriander, and salt into the pan, then place the eggplant pieces on top and continue simmering, covered, for 20 minutes more. Now give it a stir to mix the eggplant pieces into the stew.

In a bowl, whisk together the pomegranate juice and flour, and add it to the pan along with the tahini. Cook, covered, for 5 minutes more, to let the flavors combine and the stew thicken. You want a pleasant tanginess at this point, so adjust with pomegranate molasses, if necessary.

Meanwhile, peel the garlic cloves and trim the chile. Pulse them in a small food processor until finely chopped, then put in a small pan along with the remaining oil, and fry until golden. Pour this over the lentil stew, and gently stir it in. Finally, pick the parsley leaves and roughly chop them.

Divide the stew among bowls, and garnish with the pomegranate seeds, chopped parsley, and a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil.

Note:

To make your own pomegranate juice, remove the seeds from 3 pomegranates, setting 3½oz (100g) of whole seeds aside to garnish. Blend the rest, and sieve to remove the seed pulp from the juice.

Rummaniyeh

Maghmour

Eggplant & Chickpea Moussaka

Lebanon

Many associate "*moussaka*" with the Greek eggplant, potato, and lamb casserole, but the word itself derives from the Arabic "*musaqqa'a,*" pointing to a whole range of dishes that vary widely throughout the Middle East—some of them, luckily, just happen to be plant-based.

Maghmour, known as the Lebanese *moussaka*, is a delicious stew of silky-smooth eggplants and tender chickpeas in a rich tomato sauce, elevated by a generous amount of dried mint. Traditionally, it's served cold as a popular *meze*, but also makes a wonderful main if paired with some fresh Pita.

ACTIVE TIME 1 hour
TOTAL TIME 2 hours 10 minutes (without pressure cooker), plus soaking overnight
SERVES 4 with bread, or 8–10 as a meze

- 11oz (320g) dried chickpeas, or or 2 x 1¼lb (570g) jars, or 3 x 14oz (400g) cans (see Notes)
- 4 tbsp salt
- 2 large eggplants, 1¾lb (800g) in total
- 2 cups plus 2 tbsp (500ml) olive oil for frying
- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 large onions, 7oz (400g) in total
- 8 large garlic cloves
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 2 x 14oz (400g) cans of plum tomatoes
- 1 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tbsp dried mint

Soak the chickpeas with 1½ tablespoons of the salt in around 6¼ cups (1.5 liters) of water overnight.

The next day, drain and rinse the chickpeas, and put them in a large pan with 8½ cups (2 liters) of water. Bring to a boil, skim off any foam, then reduce the heat and simmer, with the lid left slightly ajar, for 1½ hours or until just tender. Alternatively, cook with 4⅓ cups (1 liter) of water for around 15 minutes in a pressure cooker (see Cooking legumes in a pressure cooker). Drain and set aside.

Meanwhile, peel the eggplants in alternating stripes, then cut them in quarters lengthwise and chop into 1¾–2in chunks. Transfer the pieces to a colander and season with 1 tablespoon of the salt. Place the colander in a bowl to catch any juices, and set aside. (To roast the eggplants in the oven, see Notes).

When the chickpeas have around 15 minutes left to cook, heat the olive oil for frying to around 350°F (180°C) in a wide saucepan (if you don't have a thermometer, place the end of a wooden spoon into the hot oil; tiny, rapid bubbles should form around the wood when it's hot enough).

Meanwhile, heat the extra virgin olive oil over medium heat in a casserole. Peel and slice the onions, and sauté in the oil until lightly golden (10–12 minutes). Peel and finely grate or crush in the garlic, and cook for 1 minute more, then stir in the tomato paste and canned tomatoes, breaking them up with a spoon. Add the remaining 1½ tablespoons of salt, 6½ tablespoons (100ml) of water, and the drained chickpeas; then simmer, covered, for 15 minutes.

Pat the eggplant chunks dry with paper towel, then fry half in the hot oil until golden (8–10 minutes), flipping them occasionally. The oil will cool down after adding the eggplant, so keep it over high heat until it comes back to temperature, by which time they will most likely have turned golden already. Transfer to a rack lined with paper towel, and continue with the rest. You can let the oil cool off entirely, then strain it through a sieve, and use it for cooking in other recipes.

Stir in the black pepper and dried mint, then fold in the eggplant chunks, and add a little more water if the sauce seems dry. Simmer, covered, for 10 minutes more. Divide among bowls, and serve warm or cold.

Notes:

⚫ *To roast the eggplants in the oven instead, skip letting them sit in the colander first. Simply drizzle the pieces with a little olive oil, season with 1 teaspoon of salt, and roast on a lined tray at 425°F 220°C for 30 minutes, or until golden.*

⚫ *If using jarred or canned chickpeas, see Using canned/jarred legumes and add to the casserole as described here.*

Maghmour

Tahu Tempe Bacem

Braised Tofu & Tempeh

Indonesia

It might seem somewhat surprising that in a collection of traditional plant-based recipes, only one features tofu and tempeh, two staples of the vegan pantry. Plant-based food around the world is so versatile that I myself didn't even notice their absence until I completed the recipe list. Yet, without question, they play a pivotal role in traditional foods.

Tahu tempe bacem is a notable example, showcasing the versatility of soybeans in one hearty side dish. Tofu is made from curdled soy milk, while tempeh is the result of fermenting cooked soybeans. "*Bacem*" refers to braising ingredients in a sweetened liquid, creating a sweet and savory flavor that is characteristic of Indonesian cuisine. It's an opportunity to experience both tofu and tempeh in an unusual way and reveals its true potential when combined with Gudeg Jogja and spicy Sambal Balado.

ACTIVE TIME 35 minutes
TOTAL TIME 3 hours 25 minutes
SERVES 4 as a side

- ¼oz (15g) seedless tamarind, or 1 tbsp tamarind paste
- 1 tbsp coriander seeds
- 3 round shallots, about 1¾oz (50g)
- 3 large garlic cloves
- ¾oz galangal
- 1 tsp salt
- 1lb (450g) firm tofu
- 14oz (400g) tempeh
- 2 tbsp soy sauce
- 1oz (30g) palm sugar
- 4⅓ cups (1 liter) coconut water
- 2 Indonesian bay leaves (daun salam; see Note)
- 4⅓ cups (1 liter) vegetable oil for deep frying

Soak the tamarind in 3 tablespoons of boiling water for 10 minutes, then use your fingers to loosen the flesh from the fibrous strings. Strain the juices into a bowl and discard the pulp. Skip this step if using the paste.

Meanwhile, toast the coriander seeds in a dry pan until fragrant, grind to a fine powder using a mortar and pestle, and put in a small food processor. Peel the shallots, garlic, and galangal, and add to the processor with the salt. Blend to a paste. Cut the tofu into eight equal chunks, and the tempeh into eight equal triangles. Place them in a large casserole and add the tamarind water (or paste), spice paste, soy sauce, palm sugar, coconut water, and Indonesian bay leaves. Bring to a boil. Simmer, covered, for 1 hour. Remove the lid and cook until almost all of the liquid is absorbed (75–90 minutes). Transfer the tofu and tempeh to a plate to steam off lightly, scraping off any remaining spice paste.

Heat the oil in a large, heavy-based saucepan to 340°F (170°C). To check if it's hot enough, place the end of a wooden spoon into the oil; there should be plenty of bubbles rising quickly to the surface. Line a rack with paper towel. Now fry the tofu and tempeh pieces in four batches until golden brown (2–3 minutes

per batch), then use a slotted spoon to transfer them to the paper to drain any excess oil. Serve warm.

Note:
Indonesian bay leaves are completely different from Mediterranean ones. They infuse the braising liquid with savory citrus notes that work well in spice-based dishes. If you can't source daun salam*, simply leave them out.*

Tahu Tempe Bacem

Besan Chilla

Chickpea Pancakes

India

Grind dried legumes, add liquid to form a batter, heat it in a pan, and watch in awe as it magically turns into a pancake. It's a method often used on the Indian subcontinent, and the technique of harnessing the naturally occurring starches in legumes ought to be better known elsewhere too.

Besan chilla, savory gram-flour pancakes, are traditionally served in north Indian homes as a breakfast, or by vendors as a popular street food. Making these in your own kitchen is an easy way to tap into their magic, and to experience chickpea flour (made from shelled black chickpeas) not merely as a gluten-free alternative to wheat flour, but as the star of the show. If you're feeling experimental, you can use a different legume flour (such as red lentil or mung bean), and change the toppings or flavor the batter with any suitable spices you have on hand. Just keep in mind that the batter will thicken over time, so it's best made and used straightaway.

ACTIVE TIME 35 minutes
TOTAL TIME 35 minutes
SERVES 2

- 7oz (200g) chickpea flour (also called gram flour or besan)
- 1 tsp carom seeds
- ½ tsp ground turmeric
- ¼ tsp chili powder
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 small tomato, about 3½oz (100g)
- 1 small onion, about 3½oz (100g)
- 2 green finger chiles
- 1oz (30g) cilantro
- ¾oz (20g) fresh root ginger
- 4 tbsp vegetable oil

To serve

- Hari Chutney

Mix together the gram flour, carom seeds, turmeric, chili powder, and salt. Whisk in 1⅓ cups (320ml) of water to form a pourable batter. Cube the tomato; peel and finely chop the onion; trim and finely chop the chiles; trim and discard the lower stems of the cilantro, and finely chop the rest. Add everything to the bowl as you go, then peel and grate in the ginger. Mix well.

Heat 1 teaspoon of the oil in a small nonstick pan over medium heat. Stir the batter well, then pour a ladleful into the pan and spread it into a thin pancake. Drizzle a little more oil around the edges, and cook until bubbles appear on the surface, and it easily comes away from the sides of the pan (1–2 minutes). Flip it and cook for 1 minute more, until lightly golden. Transfer to a plate, cover with a clean kitchen towel to keep it warm, and continue with the rest of the batter (you should have enough to make about four pancakes).

You can make the Hari Chutney while the pancakes are cooking, then serve, tear and dip into the chutney.

Besan Chilla

Chana Masala

Chickpea Curry

India

Cooking this traditional north Indian dish is much less daunting than the ingredients list makes it out to be. "*Chana*" is the Hindi word for "chickpea" and "*masala*" refers to a spice mix, so "*chana masala*" simply describes chickpeas cooked in a spiced sauce.

Each masala usually includes a few characteristic flavor notes, and this dish gets its light, tangy aroma from *anardana* (dried pomegranate seeds), and its deep color from *amla* (dried Indian gooseberries).

ACTIVE TIME 50 minutes
TOTAL TIME 2 hour 30 minutes (without pressure cooker), plus soaking overnight
SERVES 4 with chapatis or rice (see Basmati Rice)

Chana

- 11oz (320g) dried chickpeas, or 2 x 1¼lb (570g) jars, or 3 x 14oz (400g) cans (see Notes)
- 1½ tbsp salt
- 4 dried amla or 2 black tea bags

Chana Masala Powder (optional; see Notes)

- 5 dried Kashmiri chiles (or 1 tsp Kashmiri chili powder added along with the ground spices)
- 1 small cinnamon stick
- 2 whole black cardamoms
- 3 cloves
- 2 tsp coriander seeds
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 1 tsp dried fenugreek leaves
- 1 tsp anardana, or 1 tsp amchoor powder added along with the ground spices, or 1 tbsp lemon juice added with the coriander)
- ½ tsp black peppercorns
- ½ tsp fennel seeds
- 1 Indian bay leaf
- ⅛ tsp grated nutmeg
- ⅓ tsp ground turmeric

Soak the chickpeas with the 1½ tablespoons of salt in around 6¼ cups (1.5 liters) of water overnight.

The next day, drain and rinse the chickpeas, and put them in a large pan along with the *amla* (or tea bags) and 8½ cups (2 liters) of water. Bring to a boil, skim off any foam, then reduce the heat and simmer for 2 hours or until completely soft. You should be able to easily mash the chickpeas between your fingers. Alternatively, cook with 4⅓ cups (1 liter) of water for around 15 minutes in a pressure cooker (see Cooking

legumes in a pressure cooker). Remove the *amla* (or tea bags) and discard, then drain, reserving the cooking liquid.

Meanwhile, make the *chana masala* powder. Trim and seed the chiles, then toast them in a dry frying pan over medium heat with the other whole spices (up to and including the bay leaf) until fragrant. Set aside to cool slightly, then put in a spice grinder, add the nutmeg and turmeric, and grind to a fine powder. This will make more than needed, but you can store leftovers for several months at room temperature in a sealed jar. If serving rice alongside the *chana masala*, start cooking it now.

When the chickpeas have around 15 minutes left to cook, start the sauce. Heat the oil over medium heat in a casserole, peel and finely chop the onions, and sauté until lightly golden (8–10 minutes). Meanwhile, peel the garlic and ginger and trim the green chiles, then use a pestle and mortar to bash them to a paste (or blend with a little water).

Sauce

- 4 tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 large onions, about 14oz (400g) in total
- 4 large garlic cloves
- 1oz (30g) fresh root ginger
- 3 green finger chiles
- 2 large tomatoes, about 10oz (300g) in total
- 1 tbsp salt
- 3/4oz (20g) cilantro

To serve

- crunchy vegetables such as cucumbers, small onions, or chiles

Roughly chop the tomatoes, put in a blender, and blend until smooth. Add the garlic paste to the onions and cook, stirring, until fragrant. Add the blended tomatoes, and continue cooking until the juices have evaporated (8–10 minutes), stirring occasionally. Meanwhile, transfer 6 tablespoons of the chickpeas to a chopping board and use a fork to mash them; they will help to thicken the sauce later on.

Stir in 2 tablespoons of the masala powder along with the 1 tablespoon salt, and heat them through for 1 minute. Add the whole and mashed chickpeas with 2 cups plus 2 tablespoons (500ml) of the reserved cooking water. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat and simmer, covered, for 15 minutes until the liquid has lightly thickened and the chickpeas taste seasoned.

Trim and discard the lower stems of the cilantro; roughly chop the rest, and stir it through. Divide among bowls, and serve with cut, crunchy vegetables of your choice.

Notes:

⚫ *Instead of making your own* chana masala *powder, you can add 1 1/2 tablespoons garam masala, 3/4 teaspoon Kashmiri chili powder, and 1/3 teaspoon turmeric. Use lemon juice instead of the* anardana *as described above.*

⚫ *If using jarred or canned chickpeas, see Using canned/jarred legumes and use the tea bags to prepare a (1 3/4 cup) 400ml infusion to add instead of the cooking water.*

Chana Masala

Moong Dal

Tempered Split Mung Beans

India

Dal is an ingredient as well as a dish. The word originates from the Sanskrit "to split" and describes a myriad of pulses, from *chana* (chickpeas) to *masoor* (red lentils) and *moong* (mung beans) dal. Once cooked, these pulses become a cornerstone of Indian cuisine that changes from region to region and household to household. In its simplest form, the dal is cooked with a little turmeric and salt until tender. Then there is dal fry, in which a handful of aromatics are first sautéed, then stewed with the pulses. Another version is dal *tadka*, which involves India's famous "tempering" of fried aromatics that are poured over the warm dal with a satisfying sizzle.

My favorite way is to combine dal fry and *tadka*, for the best of both worlds. The result is a rich dal topped with a complementing layer of flavor. You can follow the same method for most split pulses, but mung beans have the advantage of cooking until tender without breaking down completely, giving the dish a hearty mouthfeel that makes a perfect combination with rice or flatbreads.

ACTIVE TIME 50 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 20 minutes (without pressure cooker)
SERVES 4 with Basmati Rice or flatbreads

Dal

- 11oz (320g) moong dal
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 large onion, about 7oz (200g)
- 1oz (30g) fresh root ginger
- 2 green finger chiles
- 2 large tomatoes, about 10oz (300g) in total
- 1 tsp garam masala
- ½ tsp ground turmeric
- 1oz (30g) cilantro
- ¾ tbsp salt
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp dried fenugreek leaves (optional)

Put the dal in a bowl and cover it with plenty of water. Stir it with your hands to loosen the starch, then drain and repeat until the water runs almost clear (4–5 times). Cover again with fresh water and leave to soak until needed.

Heat the oil in a large casserole over low heat (to use a pressure cooker, see Note). Peel and finely chop the onion, and sauté until lightly golden. Meanwhile, peel and finely grate the ginger; trim and thinly slice the chiles; and cube the tomatoes.

Add the ginger and chiles to the pan and fry until aromatic, then tip in the tomatoes, increase the heat, and cook until they begin to soften (1–2 minutes). Stir in the garam masala and turmeric, then drain the dal, and add to the pan with 4⅓ cups (1 liter) of water. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat and simmer, covered, for 30 minutes, or until tender. Meanwhile, trim and discard the lower stems of the cilantro, and chop the rest.

Stir in the salt and cook, covered, for 5 minutes more, stirring halfway through, then use a potato masher to break down the dal until slightly thickened. If necessary, adjust the consistency by adding more water or cooking it a little longer. Turn off the heat, then stir in the lemon juice, fenugreek leaves, if using, and most of the cilantro.

Tempering

- 1 large garlic clove
- 3 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- ½ tsp mustard seeds
- 2 dried red chiles
- 10–12 curry leaves
- 1 tsp Kashmiri chili powder
- ¼ tsp asafetida

For the tempering, peel and finely grate or crush the garlic, and have all the remaining ingredients ready. Heat the oil in a small pan over medium heat, then fry the cumin seeds and mustard seeds until they begin to sizzle (if your pan is larger, occasionally angle it to one side to puddle the oil and fry everything evenly). Stir in the garlic, and cook for 1 minute more until aromatic but not browned.

Add the dried chiles and curry leaves, and cook for a few seconds more until the leaves look vibrant green and slightly crispy. Turn off the heat and add the chili powder and asafetida. Stir well to heat through the spices, then pour it over the dal. Stir it through, then divide among bowls and sprinkle over the remaining cilantro, and serve.

Note:
To make the dal in a pressure cooker (see Cooking legumes in a pressure cooker), follow the steps above, but add the salt, together with the 4⅓ cups (1 liter) of water, and cook for around 7 minutes. Stir well to break it down without simmering it any longer.

Moong Dal

Shan Tofu

Burmese Chickpea Tofu

Myanmar

For the Shan people, the largest minority group in Myanmar (formerly Burma), chickpea flour is the primary ingredient for this culinary staple. Here, amid vibrant street-food scenes, vendors cut pieces from what appears to be a bright yellow cheese and serve it in fragrant dishes such as Tohu Thoke.

When I first made Shan tofu (also known as Burmese tofu) at home, I was captivated by the alchemy that transformed the simple mixture of chickpea flour, turmeric, and water into something silky and velvety that solidifies upon cooling. This technique is very different from that used to make the more familiar soy-based tofu, which involves curdling soy milk and pressing the curds into a firm block. But what struck me as truly remarkable was the metamorphosis of a legume-derived flour into a very different food, one that is rich in protein and naturally soy-free. In a world where plant-based protein is often synonymous with soybeans, this alternative approach to crafting tofu offers an exciting opportunity to diversify dietary choices.

ACTIVE TIME 15 minutes
TOTAL TIME 30 minutes, plus 2 hours refrigerating
SERVES 2

- 5½oz (150g) chickpea flour (also called gram flour or besan)
- ⅓ tsp ground turmeric
- ½ tsp salt

Put 1¼ cups (300ml) of water in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Meanwhile, sift the chickpea flour into a bowl, whisk in the turmeric and salt, followed by 1¼ cups (300ml) more water.

Have a straight-sized mold that holds around 3¼ cups plus 2 tablespoons (800ml) for the tofu nearby. Strain the mixture through a sieve into the boiling water to remove any lumps. Turn the heat to low, and whisking the mixture constantly, cook until it has thickened into a paste that falls in thick ribbons from the whisk. Switch to a spatula and keep stirring for 5 minutes more, then turn off the heat.

Pour the mixture into the mold and allow to cool slightly, then refrigerate for at least 2 hours to let it set. Your Shan tofu is ready!

Note:
You can use Shan tofu instead of soybean tofu in other recipes, but bear in mind that it is much more delicate than soybean tofu and might fall apart when frying it with other ingredients. Instead, cube it and sear it first in oil in a nonstick frying pan. Refrigerate any leftovers in an airtight container for up to 5 days.

Shan Tofu

Tohu Thoke

Burmese Tofu Salad

Myanmar

If you've read the recipe for Shan Tofu, you might wonder how it's traditionally used. My favorite answer is this, *tohu thoke*. This Burmese dish combines influences from neighboring regions to create a blend of sweet, savory, sour, and spicy notes. It is through the use of contrasting elements—creamy tofu, crispy shallots, plus a tangy dressing and fiery chiles—that this dish achieves a rewarding balance.

ACTIVE TIME 45 minutes
TOTAL TIME 45 minutes
SERVES 2

- 1 block of Shan Tofu
- 3 large garlic cloves
- 3 small round shallots
- 2 tbsp lime juice from 1–2 limes
- ½ cup plus 1 tbsp (140ml) groundnut oil
- pinch of salt
- 1 tsp chickpea flour (also called gram flour or besan)
- ½oz (15g) seedless tamarind (or 1 tbsp tamarind paste dissolved in 1 tbsp water)
- 2 green finger chiles
- 1½ tbsp light soy sauce
- 1 tsp golden granulated sugar
- ¾oz (20g) cilantro
- 1 fresh makrut lime leaf (or frozen)
- 2 tbsp (20g) roasted peanuts
- 1 tsp chili sediment (from a jar of chili oil)

Start by preparing the Shan Tofu.

For the salad, peel and thinly slice two of the garlic cloves and all the shallots. Juice the limes. Mix one-third of the sliced shallots with the lime juice in a small bowl, and set aside to macerate.

Line a large plate with paper towel. Put the remaining shallot slices in a small saucepan and pour over the groundnut oil. Fry the shallots over medium-low heat until deep golden (8–10 minutes), stirring regularly. Use a slotted spoon to transfer them onto the paper towel, and sprinkle with a little salt. Next, fry the sliced garlic in the same oil until just golden (2–3 minutes), then transfer to the paper-lined plate and season with salt. Set aside the oil for later.

Meanwhile, toast the chickpea flour in a small frying pan until golden in color (8–10 minutes), then set aside.

Soak the seedless tamarind in 2½ tablespoons of boiling water for 10 minutes. When cool enough to handle, use your fingers to loosen the flesh from the fibrous strings. Strain the liquid through a fine sieve into a small bowl, and discard the pulp.

For the dressing, thinly slice the chiles. Put them in a small mixing bowl with the tamarind juice (or the dissolved paste), the soy sauce, sugar, and 1 tablespoon of the shallot and garlic oil. Peel and finely grate or crush in the remaining garlic clove, and stir to combine.

Trim and discard the lower stems of the cilantro, and roughly chop the rest, thinly slice the lime leaf, and crush or roughly chop the roasted peanuts.

Remove the Shan Tofu from the mold and cut it into thin slices. Place the slices in a large mixing bowl along with the dressing, the macerated shallots and their juice, the lime leaf and chili sediment, as well as most of the crispy shallots, crispy garlic, cilantro, and peanuts. Mix well, then divide the salad between plates, and garnish with the remaining crispy shallots, crispy garlic, cilantro, peanuts, and a sprinkle of the toasted chickpea flour.

Tohu Thoke

Suan La Fen

Hot & Sour Noodle Soup

China

Fiery chiles, numbing Sichuan peppercorns, tangy black vinegar, and slippery noodles: *suan la fen* is an expression of Sichuanese street food's bold flavors.

In the busy alleys of Chengdu, you'll find street-food vendors confidently and deftly handling balls of gelatinized dough made from sweet-potato starch and water. To the sound of rhythmic tapping, the malleable mass is pressed through the holes of a specially made colander directly into boiling water, instantly forming thin glass noodles. The process is difficult to replicate at home. An ordinary colander won't do the trick and many home cooks turn to a piping bag instead, which makes it rather messy and tedious. As much as I enjoy the challenge of crafting food from scratch, this is one dish where I gladly reach for a bag of sweet-potato noodles from my local Asian grocery store.

ACTIVE TIME 30 minutes
TOTAL TIME 30 minutes plus soaking overnight
SERVES 2 as a light lunch

- 1¼oz (40g) raw soybeans, or roasted peanuts
- ½ tsp Sichuan peppercorns
- 6½ tbsp–⅔ cup (100–150ml) vegetable oil
- a large pinch of salt
- ¾oz (50g) raw peanuts, skin on, or roasted peanuts
- 7oz (200g) sweet potato noodles (vermicelli), or noodles of your choice
- 1¾ cups (400ml) vegetable stock
- 2 large garlic cloves
- 2 tbsp Chinese black vinegar (Chinkiang)
- 1 tbsp light soy sauce
- 1 tsp dark soy sauce
- 1 tsp golden caster sugar, or demerara or turbinado refined in a food processor
- 2 tbsp Sichuan chili oil, plus 1 tsp sediment
- ¾oz (20g) cilantro
- 2 scallions
- 2¼oz (70g) pickled mustard stems

Soak the soybeans in at least 1¼ cups (300ml) of water overnight. The next day, toast the Sichuan peppercorns in a dry wok or small saucepan until they smell aromatic (1–2 minutes), then use a pestle and mortar to finely grind them.

Drain the soybeans and dry them well. Line a plate with paper towel. Put the soybeans in the wok or pan you used before, and just about cover them with vegetable oil. Fry them over low heat until deep golden (10–15 minutes), then transfer to the lined plate to remove the excess oil. Set aside in a bowl and season with a pinch of salt.

Fry the peanuts in the same oil until golden (1–3 minutes). Transfer to the lined plate to drain, then set aside and season with another pinch of salt.

Meanwhile, follow the packaging instructions to cook the noodles. Heat the vegetable stock in a separate saucepan.

To make the sauce, peel and finely grate or crush the garlic cloves into a mixing bowl. Add the ground Sichuan pepper, vinegar, light soy sauce, dark soy sauce, sugar, chili oil, and chili sediment, and stir together. Divide the mixture between two serving bowls. For the garnish, trim and discard the lower stems of the cilantro, and roughly chop the rest; thinly slice the scallions, and roughly chop the mustard stems.

Divide the hot stock between the bowls and mix with the sauce. Add the noodles, then sprinkle the scallions, mustard stems, cilantro, soybeans, and peanuts over, and serve.

Suan La Fen

◀ CONTENTS

Grains

My passion for food started early, but despite having a larger-than-life appetite for as long as I can remember, my deep curiosity for food didn't really manifest itself until a transformative moment during my university years: baking my first loaf of sourdough bread. It's a humbling experience that begins with a single ingredient: flour. Add to that water and eventually salt, and these simple ingredients create a form of bacterial life that has sustained humans since the beginning of our civilization.

After hours of desperation and dozens of flat loaves, it's the small signs of success—a risen sourdough starter, a dough that doesn't stick to the basket, a slightly tangy flavor in the finished loaf—that ignite that inexhaustible human trait, perseverance... until eventually you slice open a beautifully risen loaf, watch the puff of steam escape into the air, and take in the sweet scent of fresh bread. It's immensely gratifying. Bread has always had an economic value, and poorer communities have developed recipes such as the Tuscan bread salad Panzanella and the Spanish vegetable and bread Sopas Mallorquinas to make use of leftovers. But there is an emotional value attached to it as well, one that makes wasting bread seem even more obscene.

This experience doesn't only apply to sourdough. Whether you stretch out your own hand-pulled noodles (see Biang Biang Mian), roll thin sheets for the stuffed Turkish flatbreads, Gözleme or simply watch soft Indian bread rolls, Pav, rise to golden perfection, those lessons equip you with a skill far more fundamental than the idea of just creating something edible. Because once you've made these foods from scratch, you'll never look at them the same way. It's an experience that helps you to decode food labels and ingredient lists, it qualifies price tags, it makes you appreciate, savor, and cherish every bite more.

Grains in their many forms hold this transformative power, but there's another charm to them. Since the beginning of human history, they have helped to shape the very food cultures that today make our planet so diverse.

More than 10,000 years ago, the domestication of wild grasses and their edible seeds marked the beginning of our cereal-grain cultivation. Wheat and barley formed the backbone of Babylonian diets, rice shaped the dietary and cultural landscapes of East Asia, and in the Americas, Indigenous civilizations including the Aztecs, Maya, and Incas cultivated maize. Since then, these foods have become cultural staples, from pasta to noodles, from bread rolls to pita pockets, from bulgur balls to the joy of freshly steamed *pilav*. This chapter is an invitation to taste some of that legacy, while getting your knuckles dusty and picking up a new skill along the way.

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Spaghetti all'Assassina: *Killer Spaghetti*
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Panzanella

Tuscan Bread Salad

Italy

"The oven is shaped like an egg," Emanuele Bianucci said, pointing at the wood-fired stone structure half-buried in the ground. "Life is born in the egg. Bread is born here in the oven." The finished loaves emerged endowed with more than just a wonderfully fragrant flavor. They indeed became symbolic of life.

In a time when most bread was baked this way, often in communal ovens, wasting any of it was out of the question, and something poorer communities could simply not afford to do. Countless recipes evolved to make use of stale bread. One of the best known is Tuscany's *panzanella*, a dish that Emanuele taught me when I visited his Slow Food bakery I Seminanti, near the Tuscan town of San Miniato. Because it's so simple, it works best at the peak of summer, when the ingredients are in their prime and the salad can be enjoyed in the warmth of the setting sun.

ACTIVE TIME 25 minutes
TOTAL TIME 25 minutes, plus refrigerating
SERVES 2 as a main, or 4–6 as a side

- 9oz (250g) stale Tuscan-style or country bread (from around 9¾oz (280g) fresh bread)
- 2–3 large heirloom tomatoes, around 14oz (400g) in total
- 1 cucumber
- 1 tropea onion (or 1–2 echalion shallots), around 3½oz (100g) in total
- 1¾oz (50g) basil
- 6 tbsp (90ml) extra virgin olive oil plus extra for finishing
- 2 tbsp white wine vinegar
- ¾ tsp salt
- ½ tsp freshly ground pepper

Cut the bread into chunks, put it in a large bowl, and add water to cover. Leave to soak for a few seconds to soften, then squeeze out as much water as possible. Transfer to a separate mixing bowl and crumble into smaller pieces.

Cube the tomatoes; quarter the cucumber lengthwise, then slice (I usually keep the peel on, although this is not traditional); peel and quarter the onion lengthwise and thinly slice; roughly tear the basil leaves. Add everything to the bread along with the olive oil, vinegar, salt, and pepper. Toss with your hands to mix evenly, then refrigerate for at least 30 minutes to let the flavors mingle.

Toss again, transfer to a serving bowl or platter, and drizzle with a little more olive oil.

Notes:

- ⚫ *Although this is not traditional, try swapping half of the bread with lentils—cooked from 2¾oz (80g) dried—for a more wholesome meal (see Whole Meals).*
- ⚫ *Tuscan bread is notable for being baked with no or little salt. If you get your hands on a traditional, unseasoned loaf, adjust by adding a little more salt to taste.*

Panzanella

Spaghetti all'Assassina

Killer Spaghetti

Italy

L'accademia dell'assassina might sound like a secret breeding ground for Italian hitmen, but it's a group of food enthusiasts dedicated to the preservation of one of the city of Bari's most famous dishes: *spaghetti all'assassina*. The rules for making it are clear: an iron pan must be used to achieve the right texture, the pasta must not be bronze-cut (as the starches would hinder caramelization), and the chef must be ruthless, letting the pasta sizzle and "scream" for the perfect char.

The academicians say the dish was created in the 1960s, when two men from northern Italy visited Bari and asked chef Enzo Francavilla to cook them a pasta they'd never tasted before. They were so taken aback by the dish's texture and spiciness that they called the chef "*assassino*" (murderer). With its firm bite and fiery heat, it is indeed unlike any pasta you've ever tasted.

ACTIVE TIME 40 minutes
TOTAL TIME 40 minutes
SERVES 4 as a light main

- 1¾oz (50g) tomato paste
- 14oz (400g) crushed and sieved tomatoes
- 1 tbsp salt
- 4 tablespoons olive oil, plus extra to drizzle
- 2 large garlic cloves
- 1 spicy long red chile, or extra chili flakes
- 1 heaped tsp chili flakes
- 14oz (400g) spaghetti (smooth Teflon-cut rather than bronze-cut)

Start by making a tomato broth. Put the tomato paste, 7oz (200g) of the tomatoes, the salt, and 4⅓ cups (1 liter) of water in a large saucepan, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat, and keep simmering while you start cooking the pasta. If the broth begins to bubble too heavily, simply turn off the heat.

Choose a frying pan large enough to hold the dried pasta without breaking it. Carbon steel or cast iron are best for this, but nonstick will also work. Heat the oil over medium-low heat. Peel and finely chop the garlic, trim and finely chop the chile, then sauté both with the chili flakes in the oil until the garlic begins to turn golden.

Add the remaining tomatoes, increase the heat to high, and cook for 1–2 minutes until the tomatoes have thickened slightly. Lay the dried spaghetti in the sauce so that the strands all face the same direction, and spread them into a single layer as much as possible. Cook them this way for 2–3 minutes, until the pasta sticks to the base of the pan and begins to smell toasted, then use two spatulas to carefully flip the spaghetti over. Repeat on the other side before flipping the spaghetti again.

Add about one-third of the broth to the pan, gently nudge the spaghetti to allow the liquid to spread, and cook without stirring until it has absorbed the broth and begins to stick again (3–4 minutes). Fry for a few seconds until nicely caramelized, then use the spatulas to loosen and turn the spaghetti over again. Repeat the process two more times with the remaining broth until the pasta is al dente and lightly charred. You can add a little more water in the end to cook it more, but it should retain some bite.

Once it's ready, divide among plates, drizzle with extra olive oil, and serve.

Spaghetti all’Assassina

Spanakorizo

Spinach Rice

Greece

During the 40-day fasting period leading up to Easter Sunday, much of Greece turns into a plant-based haven. "*Nistisima,*" which means "fasting food," is a category of Greek cuisine dedicated to dishes that suit the stricter fasting rules of the Orthodox Church during Lent and other fasting periods. These dishes abstain from almost all animal products, and are so widely understood as a concept that you can ask for *nistisima* in most restaurants in Greece and get a delicious plant-based meal.

One dish that's not often found on menus, however, is *spanakorizo*, which many people remember fondly as a Lenten staple that grandmothers would cook for the entire family. Slightly different variations exist across Greece. For me, it's the simple combination of complementary greens—scallions, leek, dill, and spinach—finished with plenty of lemon juice, which turns this into a memorable example of how flavorsome fasting food can be.

ACTIVE TIME 40 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 5 minutes
SERVES 4

- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil plus extra for finishing
- 1 large onion, about 7oz (200g)
- 4 scallions
- 3 large garlic cloves
- 1 leek, about 7oz (200g)
- 10oz (300g) short- or medium-grain rice (such as Greek carolina or arborio)
- 1¾lb (800g) large-leaf spinach (see Note)
- 1¾oz (50g) dill
- 1¼ tbsp salt
- ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 3 tbsp lemon juice

Heat the olive oil in a large casserole over medium-low heat. Peel and chop the onion; slice the scallions; peel and finely grate or crush the garlic; halve the leek lengthwise and slice thinly. Add everything to the casserole as you go. Sauté until the leek has softened (8–10 minutes). Meanwhile, rinse the rice and set aside.

Roughly chop the spinach (if it has thick stems, chop them a little finer) and dill, and stir both into the casserole until the spinach has wilted. Add the rice, salt, pepper, and 3 cups plus 2 tablespoons (750ml) of water, bring to a boil, then move the casserole to the smallest burner and lowest heat, and simmer, covered, for 15–20 minutes (or according to the instructions of the rice's packaging), stirring halfway through, until the rice is just tender and the stew has thickened.

Turn off the heat and stir in the lemon juice. There should still be some liquid remaining; if there is not, add a dash of boiling water from the kettle. Cover again with the lid and let it rest for 5 minutes, so the rice can absorb the rest of the liquid. Divide between shallow plates, drizzle with a little extra olive oil, and serve.

Note:
The larger-leaf spinach with thicker stems, found in bunches at specialty produce grocery stores and from farmers' markets, is ideal.

Spanakorizo

Sopas Mallorquinas

Vegetable Bread Soup

Mallorca

The small Balearic island of Mallorca takes great pride in its culinary traditions. At its core are locally cultivated ingredients such as *tap de cortí*, an aromatic, sweet pepper variety used to make ground paprika. It plays such an integral part in the island's culture that the building facades of entire villages used to be draped in curtains of these red peppers as they dried in the sun. *Tap de cortí* still weaves its way through many of Mallorca's traditional dishes, including *sopas Mallorquinas*. It's a peasant meal that was born out of the necessity to make use of leftovers from the garden and is thickened with stale bread for substance. The sweet paprika gives this dish its warming flavor.

ACTIVE TIME 45 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 15 minutes
SERVES 4

- 6 tbsp (90ml) extra virgin olive oil plus extra for drizzling
- 3 large onions, about 1lb 5oz (600g) in total
- 1 ½ tbsp salt
- 1 Savoy cabbage, about 1 ¾lb (800g)
- 4 large garlic cloves
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 ¾oz (50g) parsley
- 2 green bell peppers
- ½ cauliflower
- 3 tbsp (30g) tap de cortí paprika (or use sweet paprika)
- 14oz (400g) sliced stale brown bread

Heat the olive oil in a casserole over medium heat. Peel and slice the onions, and sauté them with the salt until they begin to turn golden (10–15 minutes). In the meantime, strip the leaves from the cabbage and tear them into bite-sized pieces.

Peel and grate or crush the garlic into the casserole, and cook until aromatic, then stir in the tomato paste. Stir in the cabbage and let the leaves soften. Meanwhile, trim and discard the lower stems of the parsley, and roughly chop the rest; core and roughly chop the bell peppers; roughly chop the cauliflower stem and leaves, and break the head into florets. Add them all to the casserole with the paprika and 4 ⅓ cups (1 liter) of water. Bring to a boil, then turn down the heat and simmer, covered, for 30 minutes, or until the cauliflower is tender.

Divide the bread among 4 bowls, and ladle over some of the broth to soften it. Drizzle the slices with olive oil, then divide the vegetables and remaining broth among the bowls. It should have the consistency of a thick stew rather than a soup. Serve with a final drizzle of olive oil.

Note:

Turn it into a more wholesome meal (see Whole Meals) by replacing half the bread with 2 x 14oz (400g) cans or a 1¼lb (570g) jar of beans, or cooked beans from 5¾oz (160g) dried weight. Add scant 1 cup (200ml) less water, and stir in the beans for the final 10 minutes (see using canned or jarred legumes).

Sopas Mallorquinas

Kısır

Bulgur Salad

Türkiye

All across Türkiye, you'll find workers' cafés called *esnaf lokantaları*. Instead of ordering from a menu, you order at the counter, choosing from a range of proudly showcased home-style dishes, many of which just happen to be plant-based. It's an excellent way to taste traditional cuisine such as *dolma* (stuffed vegetables), Kuru Börülce Salatası (black-eyed bean salad), or *soslu patlıcan* (stewed eggplants in tomato sauce), while filling your plate with a range of vegetables, grains, and legumes. No matter how diverse the choice, my hopeful gaze would always alight with eager anticipation on *kısır*, a firm favorite on a great many *lokanta* visits, and never twice the same, thanks to the regional nuances. It's one of Türkiye's signature bulgur dishes—a showstopping way to spice up grains.

ACTIVE TIME 50 minutes
TOTAL TIME 50 minutes
SERVES 4 as a light main

- 10oz (300g) fine bulgur
- 1 large onion, about 7oz (200g)
- 6 tbsp (90ml) extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 2 tbsp acı biber salçası (spicy Turkish red pepper paste)
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 3 large tomatoes, about 14oz (400g) in total
- 3oz (80g) pickled cucumbers or cornichons
- 4 scallions
- 3oz (80g) flat-leaf parsley
- ¾oz (20g) mint
- 1 large garlic clove
- ¾ tbsp salt
- 1 tsp pul biber (Aleppo pepper)
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 2 tbsp pomegranate molasses

Put the bulgur in a large bowl and stir in 1¼ cups (300ml) of boiling water. Cover and let it soak for at least 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, peel and finely chop the onion, and sauté in 2 tablespoons of the olive oil until softened and just turning golden (8–10 minutes). Stir in the tomato paste, red pepper paste, and cumin, then tip the mixture out onto the bulgur, and let both cool down.

Cube the tomatoes and pickled cucumbers; thinly slice the scallions; trim and discard the lower stems of the parsley, and finely chop the rest; finely chop the mint leaves; and peel and finely grate or crush the garlic.

Once the bulgur is cool enough to handle, knead in the cooked paste along with the salt. Add the prepped aromatics and all of the remaining ingredients (including the remaining olive oil), and mix well to combine, then serve.

Note:

It's not traditional, but you can add 3½oz (100g) of chopped walnuts to turn it into a more wholesome meal (see Whole Meals).

Kısır

Gözleme

Spinach & Potato Stuffed Flatbreads

Türkiye

On the roof terrace of her restaurant overlooking the small Turkish village of Şirince, chef Dursun Teyze was seated on a folded blanket, with her legs tucked under a low wooden table. I watched in awe as she rolled out pieces of dough into paper-thin sheets, but any compliments were brushed off with a coy smile, while she gently cooked the stuffed flatbreads on the wood-fired *sac*, Türkiye's convex griddle.

There is such comfort in food cooked over a crackling fire. It's as if one watches the flames of centuries past, when Turkish nomads first traveled from Central Asia to Anatolia, bringing with them the origins for one of the country's most famous foods. Today, the wood fire is often replaced by gas, but freshly made *gözleme* are eaten all across the country. They make a wonderful snack or light meal, and are usually served with a proud "*Afiyet olsun*!", the Turkish wish that the food you eat brings you happiness and health.

ACTIVE TIME 1 hour 15 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 50 minutes
MAKES 8

Filling

- 3 potatoes, about 14oz (400g) in total
- 1 tbsp plus ½ tsp salt
- 2 tbsp olive oil, plus extra for brushing
- 1 large onion, about 7oz (200g)
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tbsp pul biber (Aleppo pepper)
- 7oz (200g) spinach

Dough

- 14oz (400g) all-purpose flour plus extra to dust
- 1¼ tsp (8g) salt

For the filling, put the potatoes and 1 tablespoon of the salt in a saucepan, cover with water, bring to a boil and simmer, with the lid left slightly ajar, for 20–30 minutes until just about knife tender. Drain and allow to cool slightly, then peel and coarsely grate.

While the potatoes are cooling, make the dough. In a large bowl, mix the flour, salt, and 1 cup minus 2 teaspoons (210ml) of warm water. Tip it out, and knead for 1–2 minutes until it just comes together. It doesn't need to be smooth. Divide the dough into eight pieces, around 2½oz (75g) each, and shape each piece into a ball. Cover them with a reusable plastic bag or a damp kitchen towel, and let them rest for at least 10 minutes, or until needed.

To continue with the filling, heat the 2 tablespoons of oil in a frying pan over medium-low heat. Peel and finely chop the onion, and sauté until it begins to turn golden (8–10 minutes). Stir in the tomato paste and turn off the heat. Add the grated potatoes, black pepper, *pul biber*, and remaining ½ teaspoon of salt. Stir to mix and set aside. Very roughly slice or chop the spinach.

Preheat a large, heavy-based pan over medium heat. As it heats, dust the work surface with flour, and roll a dough ball into a very thin circle, 10½in–11¼in (26–28cm) wide. It helps to stretch the dough out gently with your hands toward the end. For pans with a 10½in (26cm) or wider base, spread some of the spinach and potato filling over half of the dough, leaving a little space along the edges. Brush the edges with a little water, fold the other half of the dough over to create a semicircle, and press the edges to seal. For smaller pans, add a handful of spinach and potato filling into the middle, then fold the four sides over, brushing the edge of the second-to-last layer with a little water, to seal the dough into a square parcel.

When the pan is hot, add one *gözleme*, and cook for around 1 minute until the bottom has golden spots all over. Flip it, cook for 1 minute more, then drizzle with ½ teaspoon of oil, flip it again and repeat, cooking it for 30–60 seconds more on each side, until the spots are dark golden. Transfer to a plate, and cover with a clean kitchen towel to soften and keep warm. Wipe the pan with paper towel, and repeat with the rest of the *gözleme*. Serve the gözleme whole or cut it into pieces.

Note:
Leftover cooked gözleme *can easily be frozen. To thaw, heat semicircle-shaped* gözleme *for 10 minutes and square* gözleme *for 15 minutes in a 400°F (200°C) oven.*

Gözleme

White Basmati Rice

A fragrant, long-grain variety of rice originally from northern India and Pakistan, basmati is now grown and eaten in many parts of South Asia and the Middle East. It's a great complement to legume dishes such as Khoresh Bademjan, Chana Masala and Rummaniyeh, turning them into a more wholesome meal (see Whole Meals).

ACTIVE TIME 10 minutes
TOTAL TIME 55 minutes (15 minutes with shortcuts; see Notes)
SERVES 4

- 10oz (300g) basmati rice
- 1 tsp salt

Put the rice in a small saucepan and cover it with plenty of water. Gently stir it around with your hands to loosen the starch, then drain and repeat until the water runs almost clear (usually around 3–4 times). Cover it one more time with plenty of water and let it soak for 20 minutes.

Drain the rice, and return it to the saucepan along with the salt and 2 cups plus $2\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons (510ml) of water. Bring to a boil, give it a stir, then move the pan to the smallest burner and the lowest heat and simmer, covered, for 12 minutes without stirring. Turn off the heat, and let it steam for 10 minutes more. It'll keep warm for at least 1 hour.

Tip the rice into a bowl, and fluff it up with a fork before serving.

Brown Basmati Rice

Brown (wholegrain) basmati rice has fallen somewhat out of fashion, because it can hardly compete with the fluffy texture and more delicate flavor of white rice. As the name suggests, wholegrain rice includes the whole grain: bran, germ, and endosperm. It gives it its firmer texture and brownish appearance but also makes it richer in minerals and dietary fiber, which help to keep you feeling fuller for longer.

ACTIVE TIME 10 minutes
TOTAL TIME 50 minutes
SERVES 4

- 10oz (300g) brown (wholegrain) basmati rice
- 1 tsp salt

Rinse the rice once; there's no need to soak it. Put the drained rice in a small saucepan, along with the salt and 3 cups plus 2 tablespoons (750ml) of water. Then follow the instructions for White Basmati Rice, but increase the cooking time to 30 minutes.

Notes:

⚫ *Rinsing and soaking the white rice will result in fluffier, lighter grains, but it's optional. If you're in a rush, just rinse the rice under running water, then cook it straightaway, and let it steam for as long as you have time. You can also use boiling water from the kettle.*

⚫ *To measure the rice and water by volume, follow a 1:1.5 rice-to-water ratio for white basmati rice and a 1:2 ratio for brown rice.*

⚫ *Although you can divide or multiply this recipe, I'd not recommend cooking a smaller quantity than for 2 people, because the water might evaporate too quickly, and the rice might burn.*

Şehriyeli Pilav

Rice with Orzo

Türkiye

Order Turkish rice in a restaurant, and it's likely that your bowl of steamed rice will also be dotted with small pieces of orzo pasta ("*şehriye*" in Turkish). While this is the most common version, look at the menu, and you will realize that *pilav* is served in many other ways—perhaps flavored with tomatoes, onions, dried fruits, nuts, and legumes, or even made with bulgur instead of rice.

Pilav is usually prepared with ample amounts of butter, especially in restaurants, but it's not uncommon for home cooks to use olive oil instead, opening up a wide range of naturally plant-based side dishes to complement fragrant Turkish staples such as Kuru Fasulye. It's a pillar of Turkish cuisine and a convenient classic to have up your sleeve.

ACTIVE TIME 15 minutes
TOTAL TIME 40 minutes
SERVES 4

- 9¼oz (260g) short-grain rice (such as baldo)
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 3 tbsp orzo pasta (arpa şehriye)
- 1 tsp salt

Put the rice in a bowl and cover with plenty of water. Gently move it around with your hands to loosen the starch, then drain and repeat until the water runs almost clear (usually around 3–4 times). Drain and set aside.

Heat the oil in a small saucepan for which you have a lid, and fry the orzo until it begins to turn golden. Add the rice, salt, and scant 2 cups (460ml) of fresh water, and give it a stir. Bring to a boil, stir once more, then move the pan to the smallest burner and the lowest heat, and simmer, covered, for 12 minutes without stirring. Turn off the heat, and let it steam for 10 minutes more with the lid on. It will keep warm for at least 1 hour.

To serve it in the traditional dome shape, transfer the rice to a bowl, and press it down with a spoon. Let it steam for about 1 minute, then tip it out onto a plate.

Note:
Although not traditional, you can also use basmati rice. Just increase the water to 2 cups plus 2 tablespoons (500ml).

Şehriyeli Pilav

Pita

Leavened Flatbread

Israel

Tear off pieces to scoop up Hummus, serve them alongside flavorful stews such as Maghmour, or use them to mop up Shatat Dakwa—pita breads are as versatile as they are fun to eat. Although common across the Mediterranean, Middle East, and parts of North Africa, I chose the Israeli version for this book. They tend to be a little fluffier in texture, making it extremely satisfying to turn them into "pockets" for one of my favorite Tel Aviv experiences: stuffed to the brim with hummus, falafel, and chopped salad (see Falafel Pita).

Traditionally, pita is baked under intense heat, allowing it to puff up beautifully without building a crispy crust. At home, I get the best results by using bread flour (instead of all-purpose flour) in the dough and baking the pitas on a preheated tray. You can literally watch them rise to pillows that are at the brink of bursting as they bake. The process is only trumped by biting into the oven-warm breads—one of the gratifying experiences reserved for homemade foods.

ACTIVE TIME 40 minutes
TOTAL TIME 2 hours
MAKES 6

- ¾oz (20g) fresh yeast, or a ¼oz (7g) packet dried yeast
- 1 tbsp golden granulated sugar
- 3 tbsp olive oil, plus extra for greasing
- 14oz (400g) bread flour, plus extra to dust
- 1¼ tsp (8g) salt

Crumble the yeast into a large bowl. Add the sugar, olive oil, and 1 cup minus 4 teaspoons (220ml) of lukewarm water, and whisk to dissolve the yeast. Add the flour and salt, and use your hands to mix everything into a rough dough.

Transfer the dough to a work surface, cover it with the bowl placed upside down over it, and let it rest for 5 minutes, which will kick-start the gluten development. Once it has rested, knead the dough for 5 minutes until smooth and elastic.

Shape the dough into a large ball, grease a clean bowl with a little oil, and place the dough inside. Cover it with a reusable plastic bag or a damp kitchen towel, and let it double in size for 30–60 minutes (the length of time will depend on the ambient temperature).

Return the dough to the work surface, and divide it into six pieces, around 4oz (110g) each. Shape each piece into a ball by tucking the edges underneath, before stretching it over the work surface in circular movements with one hand. You are aiming to create a smooth surface across the dough. Cover the balls again.

Dust the surface with a little flour and roll the dough balls out into round pitas, roughly 5½in wide. Place the rolled pitas on a clean kitchen towel as you go, cover them with another clean kitchen towel, and let them rise for 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, preheat the oven with a baking sheet inside it to 480°F (250°C). Once the pitas have risen, carefully remove the baking sheet. To transfer a pita onto it, first flip it onto your hand by lifting the kitchen towel.

Place 2–3 pitas on the hot baking sheet, return it to the oven, and bake for 4–5 minutes, until puffed up and just turning golden. Line a large bowl with a clean kitchen towel, put the hot pitas inside, and fold the kitchen towel over the top to keep them warm and allow them to soften. Repeat with the remaining dough.

Pictured here

Notes:

- ⚫ *You can also bake the pitas in a heavy-based pan. Preheat it over medium-high heat until very hot, then reduce the heat to medium-low. Place a pita inside, and bake for just 20 seconds, then flip it over and bake it for 20 seconds more. Keep going this way, flipping it every 20 seconds or so, until it has puffed up and looks golden on both sides (2–3 minutes per pita). Transfer to the bowl, covered with the kitchen towel to keep warm, while you continue with the rest.*
- ⚫ *You can freeze leftover pitas. Thaw from frozen by reheating them in the toaster or for 10 minutes in a 400°F (200°C) oven.*

Ugali

Cooked Maize Meal

Kenya

Maize arrived in Africa in the 16th century, when Portuguese traders first brought it over from the Americas. Because of its relatively high yields, farmers quickly embraced it in their fields—and it soon became a staple diet of the workforce, who ground the maize into meal, mixed it with water, and cooked it to a thick porridge that stiffens to a sliceable texture. It is now considered one of Kenya's staple foods. In fact, *ugali* is popular in many countries across the African Great Lakes region, albeit under different names, and was even listed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The lack of salt may come as a surprise, but *ugali* is traditionally paired with fragrant dishes such as Maharagwe. To eat it, pinch off a walnut-sized piece, give it an indentation with your thumb, and use it to scoop up the sauce. One of the highlights of making fresh *ugali* is the crispy leftovers that release from the side and bottom of the pan as it cools down—a much loved snack with the aroma of roasted corn.

ACTIVE TIME 10 minutes
TOTAL TIME 15 minutes
SERVES 4

- 1 cup minus 1 3/4 tbsp (160g) white maize meal/cornmeal

Put scant 2 cups (450ml) of water in a saucepan and bring it to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium, and slowly pour in the maize meal, stirring constantly. Continue stirring until it begins to thicken to a dense porridge, then use a wooden spoon to smooth the mixture against the sides of the pan, until it pulls away in one big clump when you stir it (1–2 minutes). This will take a bit of effort while the maize meal thickens, but it will help to remove any lumps.

Spread the mixture into an even layer, increase the heat to medium-high and cook for 3–5 minutes more without stirring, until the edges turn slightly golden and it begins to smell toasted.

Turn off the heat and transfer the mixture to a small bowl, leaving any stuck crispy bits in the pan (they will easily loosen later on). Press the *ugali* firmly into the bowl to create an even shape, then tip it out onto a plate and serve warm.

Pictured here

Note:
Ugali *is traditionally made with fine white cornmeal, but you can use finely ground yellow cornmeal (such as polenta) instead.*

Pav

Indian Bread Rolls

India

Place a *pav* on your hand and you barely feel its weight. It's fluffy, soft, and incredibly light. Surprisingly, it's also naturally vegan. When I watched dozens of perfectly risen *pav* disappear into the inferno of the wood-fired oven at Mumbai's Roshan Bakery, the owner explained that it's the quintessential poor man's food. Dairy and eggs would be far too expensive for a soft bread roll that is sold for less than 5 rupees apiece. Until then, I considered bread rolls in general a lost part of my diet. Now, they were back on the menu, allowing me to savor some of Mumbai's most iconic foods, such as the famous Vada Pav.

ACTIVE TIME 30 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour, plus 2 hours resting
MAKES 9

- 3/4oz (20g) fresh yeast, or a 1/4oz (7g) packet dried yeast
- 1 tsp (7g) golden granulated sugar
- 4 tbsp vegetable oil, plus 2 tbsp for brushing
- 14oz (400g) bread flour
- 1 1/4 tsp (8g) salt

Crumble the yeast into a large bowl. Add the sugar, oil, and scant 1 cup (210ml) of warm water, and whisk to dissolve the yeast. Add the flour and salt, and use your hands to mix everything to a rough dough. Transfer the dough to a work surface, cover it with the bowl placed upside down, and let it rest for 5 minutes, which will kick-start the gluten development. After it has rested, knead it for 5 minutes until smooth and elastic. It should bounce back when you poke it.

Shape the dough into a large ball, by stretching it with both hands curved around it toward you over the surface. Grease a clean bowl with oil, put the dough inside it, and cover it with a reusable plastic bag or a damp kitchen towel. Let it rise until doubled in size (30–60 minutes, depending on the ambient temperature).

Tip the risen dough out onto the work surface and divide it into nine equal portions, 2 1/4–2 1/2oz (70g–75g) each. Grease an 8 x 8in (20 x 20cm) baking pan with oil, then shape each piece into a ball by tucking the edges underneath, and stretching it over the work surface in circular movements with one hand. You want to create a smooth surface across the dough. Think of it as a skin that drapes around it and traps the air while baking, allowing it to expand beautifully. Place the balls in three rows into the baking pan, and press them down (at which point their sides should be touching). It might seem counter-intuitive, but don't worry, they will rise again. Cover with the plastic bag or damp kitchen towel and let them double in size again for 30–60 minutes.

Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 425°F (220°C). Bake the rolls for 20–25 minutes until golden brown, rotating the tray 180 degrees halfway through for even baking. Remove them from the oven and whisk together the 2 tablespoons of oil with 2 tablespoons of water. Brush this over the hot rolls to give them a shiny surface, then let them cool down, uncovered, for 30 minutes, to allow them to soften before serving.

Pictured here

Biang Biang Mian

Hand-Pulled Noodles in Fragrant Chili Oil

China

If you were to wander past noodle shops in the streets of Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi province in northwest China, you would soon notice a rhythmic sound filling the air. "*Biang biang*" is onomatopoeic, descriptive of the dough being stretched and slapped against the workbench. Done right, the noodles should be as wide as a belt, while still having a pleasantly chewy texture. It's a skillful task, but whether they're thin and stretched out to perfection, or if they turn out a little thicker if made at home, it won't lessen their allure.

ACTIVE TIME 40 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 30 minutes
SERVES 2

- 9oz (250g) all-purpose flour (use flour with a 10–11% protein content, which will be listed on the nutrition label)
- ¼ tsp salt, plus extra for boiling
- 5 tbsp (75ml) vegetable oil plus extra for coating
- 1 bok choy
- 2 scallions
- 2 garlic cloves
- ½ tsp Sichuan peppercorns
- 2 tbsp light soy sauce
- 1 tbsp Chinese black vinegar (Chinkiang)
- 2 heaped tsp Chinese chili powder (or crushed chili flakes)

In a bowl, mix the flour, salt, and ½ cup (125ml) of water to a rough dough. Tip it out onto a clean work surface and knead for 5 minutes. Don't add more water; it should be quite tough. Cover the dough with the upturned bowl, and let it rest for 10 minutes, then knead it for 10 minutes more until smooth. Kneading creates a strong gluten structure, so the dough won't tear when pulling.

Shape the dough into eight short sausages, around 1oz (45g) each, and coat each with oil. Transfer to a container, cover, and let them rest for 1 hour.

Around 20 minutes before the dough is ready, bring a large pan of salted water to a boil. Meanwhile, divide the bok choy into stalks; finely slice the scallions; and peel and finely chop the garlic. Toast the Sichuan peppercorns in a dry frying pan, and grind in a mortar with a pestle. Divide the soy sauce and vinegar evenly between two serving bowls.

Reset your kitchen surface to make space for the noodles. Roll out one piece of dough into a rectangle around 3¼ x 5½in (8 x 14cm), then use a chopstick to make a central indentation along the length. Holding the ends of the dough in your hands, slap it onto the work surface several times, while gently pulling to stretch it out to 1–2mm thick. If it tears while pulling, let it rest, and try again.

Next, tear it along the indentation to create one long noodle loop (you can use a knife to first reinforce the indentation). Set aside. Continue with the remaining dough until you've shaped the first four noodles. Boil them together with half of the bok choy for 1–2 minutes, then use tongs to transfer the noodles and bok choy to a sieve to drain. Tip the noodles and bok choy into one of the serving bowls. You can mix the noodles with a little oil to prevent them from sticking. Continue with the rest of the dough and bok choy, and tip into the second bowl.

Heat the oil in a small pan over high heat, until it just begins to smoke while you divide the scallions, chili, Sichuan pepper, and garlic over the noodles. Pour half of the hot oil over the aromatics in each bowl, aiming for the chili and garlic so they sizzle. Give it a good stir, and serve straightaway.

Biang Biang Mian

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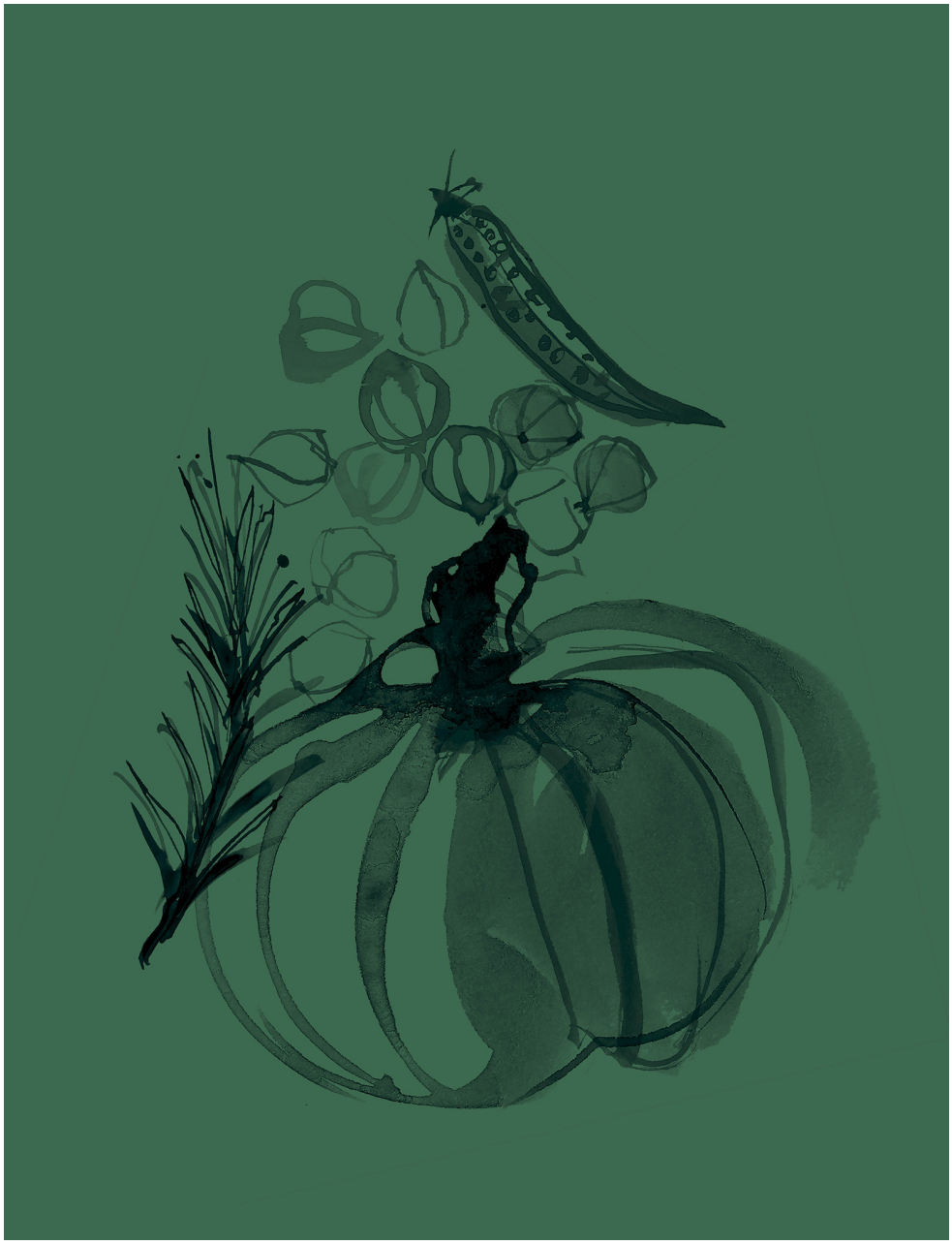

Whole Meals

Science is oftentimes simply catching up with the long-held wisdom of our ancestors. Nowadays we're aware of the important role that protein, fiber, and carbohydrates play in a balanced diet, but many traditional dishes have long been structured around these nutrients. Humans have intuitively put together legumes, grains, and nuts to make fueling meals, especially during periods of fasting or economic hardship, when animal-based proteins were out of bounds. *Kibbeh* are traditionally made with a spiced mixture of bulgur and meat, but when following the fasting rules of Lent, Lebanese Christians combined bulgur, walnuts, and pumpkin into Kebbet Laa'tin for a nourishing meal.

In Sicily, peasants made inexpensive hand-shaped pasta from semolina flour and water, and served them with fava beans slow-cooked in a vegetable stew, thereby creating Lolli con Fave. Spanish farmers, who couldn't often afford meat but needed a rich meal to fuel their physically demanding work, put together rice, beans, chard, and a flavorsome broth to make Arròs amb Bledes.

These combinations are not a product of intuition alone, but are often simply a matter of making use of what the land provided at the time. Rice and beans, when grown in rotation, were foods that farmers knew would keep the soil fertile over generations. Inevitably, these ingredients were united on our plates. Today, we know that dishes that include grains with legumes or nuts give us a prolonged feeling of satiety, of feeling full, in addition to providing many of the nutrients our bodies need.

While I've dedicated a chapter to these whole meals, you will find suggestions throughout the book that invite you to complement the other recipes following the same principle. Sometimes it's as intuitive as serving a chunk of bread alongside the Greek lentil soup Fakes, or pairing the Persian eggplant and yellow pea stew Khoresh Bademjan with freshly steamed rice. Other times it's about serving the dishes in complementary ways, such as pairing the coconut and jackfruit stew, Gudeg Jogja with Tahu Tempe Bacem, Indonesian braised tofu and tempeh.

Some of the recipes in this chapter can be made even more wholesome by serving them with a side of vegetables. Mujaddara is a delicious mixture of spiced lentils and rice, but only feels complete if paired with a fresh farmer's salad (see Salata Falahiyeh). Idli, fluffy, steamed cakes made from a fermented rice and lentil batter, beg to be dipped into the fragrant vegetable curry called Sambar. In the end, combining these elements is not only giving in to our desire for a nutritious meal. Above all, it's a victory for our taste buds.

Pasta e Lenticchie: *Pasta with Lentils*
Ribollita: *Tuscan Bread Soup*
Lolli con Fave: *Pasta with Slow-Cooked Fava Beans*
Mercimek Köftesi: *Spiced Lentil Balls*
Espinacas con Garbanzos: *Spinach with Chickpeas*
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Mujaddara: *Lentils & Rice with Caramelized Onions*
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Bengaluru-Style Masala Dosa: *Rice & Lentil Pancake with Potato Stuffing*
Uttapam: *Fermented Rice & Lentil Pancake*
Falafel Pita: *Chickpea Fritter Pita*

Pasta e Lenticchie

Pasta with Lentils

Italy

The Italian saying "*brutto ma buono*" literally translates to "ugly but good" and is often uttered about dishes that might not seem glamorous at first but taste delicious. The Neapolitan *pasta e lenticchie* is one such dish. Its comforting simplicity has turned it into a staple that has spread from Naples to the whole of Italy, where local lentil varieties and pasta shapes are flavored with a traditional *soffritto* for a satisfying meal. Like the saying, it highlights the beauty found in simplicity, and the richness of experiences that sometimes lie hidden beyond that first glance.

ACTIVE TIME 30 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 20 minutes
SERVES 4

- 2 large garlic cloves
- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, plus extra to serve
- 1 large onion, about 7oz (200g)
- 1 large carrot, about 4½oz (125g)
- 1 celery stalk
- 3 small dried chiles, or 1 tsp chili flakes
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 10oz (300g) green lentils
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tbsp salt
- 10oz (300g) ditaloni rigati pasta or any similar leftover pasta shapes

Peel and halve the garlic cloves, and put them in a casserole along with the oil. Turn the heat to low, allowing the garlic to flavor the oil. Meanwhile, peel the onion, and finely cube, along with the carrot and celery, adding them to the garlic as you go. Sauté everything until the onion is translucent (10–15 minutes).

Break or use scissors to cut the chiles into the casserole, and stir them in along with the tomato paste. Rinse the lentils and tip them into the casserole as well, followed by the bay leaf and 6¾ cups (1.6 liters) of water. Bring to a boil, then simmer, covered, for 20 minutes, or until the lentils are tender.

Add the salt and pasta and cook, covered, for 10–15 minutes more, or until the pasta is al dente, adding hot water from the kettle if needed to keep the pasta covered. Remove the bay leaf, then divide the pasta and lentils among bowls, and serve with a generous drizzle of olive oil.

Pasta e Lenticchie

Ribollita

Tuscan Bread Soup

Italy

This dish dates back to the Middle Ages, when servants would gather leftover bread from noble banquets and combine it with minestrone for a more substantial meal. I fell in love with *ribollita* after visiting Trattoria Cammillo, the epitome of an Italian trattoria, in Florence. In the small dining room hung with framed pictures, waiters joke with each other while uncorking wine bottles and delivering plates of traditional Tuscan fare from the open kitchen. Owner Chiara Masiero, whose father opened the trattoria in 1944, taught me how to cook this historic dish. The word, she explained, translates as "reboiled," referring to the reheating of a portion of the soup with stale bread before serving.

ACTIVE TIME 1 hour
TOTAL TIME 3 hours 15 minutes (without pressure cooker), plus overnight soaking and 3 hours cooling time
SERVES 4

- 10oz (300g) dried cannellini/white kidney beans, or 2 x 1¼lb (570g) jars, or 3 x 14oz (400g) cans (see Note)
- 3 tbsp salt
- 1 sprig of rosemary
- 10oz (300g) lacinato kale
- ¼ head of Savoy cabbage
- 1 potato
- a few sprigs of thyme
- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, plus extra to serve
- 1 large onion, about 7oz (200g)
- 2 carrots
- 2 celery sticks
- 3 large garlic cloves
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 10oz (300g) stale Tuscan bread (or a country loaf)

Soak the beans with 1½ tablespoons of salt in about 6¼ cups (1.5 liters) of water overnight. The next day, drain and rinse the beans, and put them in a large saucepan with the rosemary and 8½ cups (2 liters) of fresh water. Bring to a boil, skim off any foam, reduce the heat, and simmer with the lid slightly ajar for 1 hour, or until almost tender. Alternatively, cook with 4⅓ cups (1 liter) of water for around 10 minutes in a pressure cooker. Remove and discard the rosemary, drain the beans, and reserve the cooking liquid.

When the beans have around 30 minutes left, prepare the vegetables: tear the kale leaves into small pieces, and finely chop the stems; halve and thinly slice the cabbage; cut the potato into small chunks; and tie the thyme sprigs with butcher's string. Set aside.

Heat the olive oil in a large casserole. Peel the onion, and finely cube along with the carrots and celery, adding them to the casserole as you go. Tip in the kale stems, and sauté everything until the onion is translucent (10–12 minutes), then peel and finely grate or crush in the garlic, and cook until aromatic. Stir in the tomato paste, followed by the potatoes, thyme, kale leaves, and cabbage.

Combine the leftover bean cooking liquid with fresh water to make 8½ cups (2 liters), and add to the casserole with the pepper and remaining 1½ tablespoons of salt. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer, covered, for 1 hour. Blend half of the beans with 1 cup plus 1 tablespoon (250ml) of water in a blender until smooth, then add to the casserole with the remaining cooked beans, return to a boil, and simmer, covered, for 30 minutes more.

Turn off the heat, cut the bread into chunks, and stir them into the soup. Cover, and let it cool entirely (2–3 hours or overnight, during which time the bread will soak up most of the liquid). To serve, bring it back to a boil, and use a spoon or potato masher to break down the bread until it has thickened the soup. Divide among bowls, and finish with an extra drizzle of olive oil.

Note:
If using jarred or canned beans, see Using canned/jarred legumes, omit the rosemary, and blend as described here.

Ribollita

Lolli con Fave

Pasta with Slow-Cooked Fava Beans

Italy

I first tasted *lolli con fave* when I traveled to Modica, Sicily, and met with Grazia Gintoli in the kitchen of her trattoria at the edge of town, where she shared secrets for cooking the most flavorsome beans and kneading the perfect semolina dough. She told me that, even at home, she'd rise at 5:00 a.m. to make fresh pasta for her guests. There was a gleam of pride radiating from her, which defied any notion that the act of making fresh pasta was a chore; to her, it was an opportunity to get together with loved ones over a home-cooked meal.

With roots in Modica, *lolli con fave* is a culinary ode to the simplicity and resourcefulness of Italy's *cucina povera* (the cooking of the poor). Thanks to a few simple cooking techniques and time, vegetables and beans are transformed into a rich, simmering stock, culminating in a hearty, velvety one-pot dish. The addition of a cubed, peeled potato is another touch of *cucina povera* brilliance. By the time the beans are tender, the potato has almost completely disintegrated into the stock, creating a delightfully creamy texture. The slow-cooked beans are traditionally accompanied by freshly made durum-wheat pasta called *lolli*, one of the easiest pasta shapes to make at home.

ACTIVE TIME 1 hour
TOTAL TIME 2 hours 15 minutes (without a pressure cooker), plus soaking overnight
SERVES 4

Fave

- 10oz (300g) dried whole fava beans
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1 small onion, about 3½oz (100g)
- 1 floury potato
- 1 carrot
- 2 celery sticks
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 tbsp salt
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, plus extra to serve
- chili flakes, to serve

Lolli (or use 10oz (300g) store-bought pasta of your choice)

- 10oz (300g) semolina flour (durum wheat flour), plus extra to dust
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

Soak the beans with the baking soda in around 6¼ cups (1.5 liters) of water overnight.

The next day, peel the onion and potato, and cube them along with the carrot and celery. Drain and rinse the beans, and put them in a large pan with the cubed vegetables, bay leaf, tomato paste, and 5 cups plus 4½ tablespoons (1.25 liters) of water.

Bring to a boil, then simmer, covered, for 1½ hours, or until the beans are tender, stirring occasionally (see Notes, to use a pressure cooker).

For the *lolli*, mix the ingredients in a bowl with ⅔ cup (150ml) of lukewarm water, to form a rough dough. Tip out onto a work surface, and knead for 5 minutes or until smooth and elastic. Don't be tempted to add more water; it should be quite stiff. Cover the dough with an upturned bowl while you shape the first *lolli*.

Cut a ¼in (5mm) slice off the dough and roll it into a ½in (1cm) wide piece, similar to a long breadstick (see Ribollita). Cut into 2in (5cm) pieces. Using your index, middle, and ring fingers, drag each piece over the work surface to make the *lolli* shape. Transfer to a lightly floured tray and continue with the rest of the dough.

Bring a kettle of water to a boil. Stir the salt and olive oil into the stew, then stir in the *lolli* (or dried pasta of your choice) and add enough boiling water from the kettle to barely cover the pasta.

Return to a boil and cook, uncovered, for 10–15 minutes, until the *lolli* have a pleasant bite. Add more water if necessary, bearing in mind that you want to end up with a creamy sauce.

Divide between 4 bowls, and serve with an extra drizzle of olive oil and a sprinkle of chili flakes.

Notes:

- ⚫ *To cook the beans and vegetables in a pressure cooker, use only 3 cups plus 2 tablespoons (750ml) of water, and add the salt and olive oil. Cook for around 15 minutes, then stir in the pasta and continue as here.*
- ⚫ Lolli con fave *champions the local* Fava Cottoia di Modica *beans, which are nowadays safeguarded under the Slow Food Presidium. This specific bean variety can be difficult to find outside of Sicily, but you can substitute them with Egyptian-style, large fava beans, which you can find at Middle Eastern stores.*

Lolli con Fave

Mercimek Köftesi

Spiced Lentil Balls

Türkiye

Ayşe Nur Mıhçı taught me how to make *mercimek köftesi* at her idyllic lokanta Asma Yaprağı near Alaçatı. This dish is said to have originated in southeast Türkiye, where lentils have been cultivated for centuries. Chances are you won't find them on many restaurant menus. Instead, they are hidden away in the kitchens of Turkish homes.

Mercimek köftesi have a special place in my heart because they are not just savory snacks—they are a communal experience. Place them at the center of a *meze*-filled table, and they have the power to bring everyone closer together, as you all help yourselves, placing the soft *köftesi* on crisp lettuce leaves, drizzling over lemon juice, and tucking in.

ACTIVE TIME 45 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 20 minutes
SERVES 2 as a main or 6 as part of a meze spread (can easily be doubled)

- 6¼oz (180g) red lentils
- 3½oz (100g) fine bulgur
- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 large onion, about 7oz (200g)
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 2 tbsp tatlı biber salçası (Turkish mild red pepper paste)
- 1 tbsp ground cumin
- 4 scallions
- 1¾oz (50g) parsley
- 1 tbsp pul biber (Aleppo pepper)
- 2 lemons
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 Little Gem lettuces

Rinse the lentils until the water runs almost clear, then put them in a lidded saucepan with 2 cups (475ml) of water. Bring to a boil, turn down the heat and simmer, with the lid slightly ajar, over the lowest heat for 20 minutes. Turn off the heat and stir in the bulgur, then cover (this time entirely), and let the bulgur absorb the water in the pan for 10 minutes. Tip everything into a large mixing bowl, flatten it to let the steam escape, and let it cool until the mixture can be handled (around 20 minutes).

Meanwhile, heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a frying pan. Peel and finely chop the onion, then sauté until softened and just turning golden (8–10 minutes). Stir in the tomato paste, *tatlı biber salçası* and cumin, cook for 1 minute more, then turn off the heat.

When the bulgur has cooled, finely chop the scallions and leafy part of the parsley, and add to the mixing bowl, followed by the cooked tomato and pepper paste, *pul biber*, juice of one lemon (2 tablespoons), remaining olive oil, and salt. Mix everything well with your hands.

Separate the lettuce leaves and spread them out evenly on a serving platter. Moisten your hands with water and shape the mixture into small ovals, around 1oz (30g) each, squeezing them with your fingers in the palm of your hand to make the indentations (see here), then stack them on top of the lettuce.

Cut the remaining lemon lengthwise into wedges and arrange on the platter before serving.

Note:
Give the dish a seasonal spin by serving the köftesi *on a variety of leaves, such as sorrel, kale, and lacinato kale.*

Mercimek Köftesi

Espinacas con Garbanzos

Spinach with Chickpeas

Spain

Step into a traditional tapas bar in the province of Seville and you'll most likely find this dish on the menu. What might seem like a simple stew of spinach and chickpeas is actually the product of deep-rooted Arab and Phoenician influences; these societies first introduced ingredients such as chickpeas and spinach, as well as spices including cumin, to Andalusia centuries ago. The addition of cumin is one of the secrets to this comforting stew, along with the ingenious technique of making a creamy sauce out of bread toasted in garlic oil. Once finished, it's served so thick that it is best eaten with a fork.

ACTIVE TIME 45 minutes
TOTAL TIME 2 hours 10 minutes (without a pressure cooker), plus soaking overnight
SERVES 4

- 11oz (320g) dried chickpeas, or 2 x 1¼lb (570g) jars, or 3 x 14oz (400g) cans (see Note)
- 4 tbsp salt
- 1¾lb (800g) large-leaf spinach or baby spinach leaves
- 6 tbsp (90ml) extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 6 large garlic cloves
- 2 large slices of bread (I use sourdough), about 3½oz (100g), plus extra to serve
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 1½ tsp pimentón de la vera dulce (sweet smoked paprika)
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper

Soak the chickpeas overnight in around 6¼ cups (1.5 liters) of water with 1½ tablespoons of the salt.

The next day, drain the chickpeas, and put them in a large saucepan with around 8½ cups (2 liters) of water (you'll need enough space for the spinach later on). Bring it to a boil, skim off any foam from the top, cover with the lid slightly ajar, and simmer for 1 hour 30 minutes, or until just tender. Alternatively, cook with 1 tablespoon of salt and 4⅓ cups (1 liter) of water for around 15 minutes in a pressure cooker. In the meantime, roughly chop the spinach (if it has thick stems, chop them a little finer; if using smaller spinach leaves, use as is).

Once the chickpeas are tender, add 1½ tablespoons of the salt and cook for 10 minutes more (skip this step if you used a pressure cooker). Stir in the spinach until just wilted, then drain the chickpeas and spinach, and set aside.

Meanwhile, heat 3 tablespoons of the olive oil in a wide casserole over medium heat. Peel the garlic and fry the whole cloves until golden (3–4 minutes), then transfer to the jug of a blender. Toast the bread in the oil remaining in the pan until golden on both sides (3–4 minutes), then chop the bread into chunks and add to the blender jug, along with the tomato paste, the remaining 1 tablespoon of salt, and 1¾ cups (400ml) of water. Blend to a thick paste.

Heat the remaining 3 tablespoons of oil in the casserole. Stir in the *pimentón*, cumin, and pepper, and once aromatic, carefully pour in the blended paste (it will splatter) along with the drained chickpeas and spinach, and another 6½ tablespoons (100ml) of water (don't add the water if using baby spinach leaves from a bag). Stir to coat evenly, return to a simmer, and cook for 5 minutes more, until the sauce has thickened and darkened slightly.

Serve in bowls, with a drizzle of olive oil, and extra bread on the side.

Note:
If using jarred or canned chickpeas, see Using canned/jarred legumes and wilt the spinach in salted boiling water. For canned chickpeas, first season them in the water used for wilting the spinach.

Espinacas con Garbanzos

Arròs amb Bledes

Rice with Beans & Chard

Spain

Many of these recipes were born out of necessity, often as an inexpensive way to nourish farmers and laborers for their physically demanding work. *Arròs amb bledes* (literally "rice with chard") is virtually unknown outside of its Valencian homeland, where it is cherished as a nostalgic Sunday meal that would bring generations of the entire family together.

Known as "soupy rice," it uses the starch from the potatoes and rice to thicken the broth. It's a nifty trick to achieve a velvety sauce, but the highlight here is the combination of saffron and smoked paprika, which gives the dish a flavor reminiscent of seafood paella.

ACTIVE TIME 40 minutes
TOTAL TIME 2 hours 20 minutes, plus soaking overnight
SERVES 4

- 10oz (300g) dried cannellini/white kidney beans, or 2 x 1¼lb (570g) jars, or 3 x 14oz (400g) cans (see Note)
- 3¼ tbsp salt
- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 large onion, about 7oz (200g)
- 10oz (300g) swiss chard
- 2 large tomatoes, about 10oz (300g) in total
- 3 large garlic cloves
- 1½ tsp pimentón de la vera dulce (sweet smoked paprika)
- 2 large floury potatoes, about 14oz (400g) in total
- a large pinch of saffron
- 10oz (300g) paella rice, such as bomba

Soak the beans with 1½ tablespoons of salt in around 6¼ cups (1.5 liters) of water overnight.

The next day, heat the olive oil in a large casserole. Peel and finely chop the onion, and sauté on medium-low heat until translucent (8–10 minutes). Meanwhile, roughly chop the chard leaves and slice the stems. Grate the tomatoes and set aside (eat the leftover peel as a snack with some olive oil and salt, or discard).

Peel and grate or crush the garlic into the casserole, and cook for 1 minute more until the raw scent has disappeared, then stir in the paprika and grated tomato. Let the juice evaporate before adding all of the chard. Drain and add the soaked beans along with 8½ cups (2 liters) of fresh water. Bring to a boil, then simmer, covered, for 45 minutes, or until the beans are just turning tender. Meanwhile, peel and cut the potatoes into bite-sized chunks.

Add the potatoes and saffron to the casserole, and cook, covered, for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, rinse the rice in cool running water until the water runs almost clear. Add the rice and remaining 1¾ tablespoons of salt to the casserole. Boil, uncovered, over medium heat for 6 minutes, give it a stir, then reduce the heat

to low, and simmer for a further 10 minutes, or until the rice is tender. Turn off the heat, and set aside for 5 minutes to let the rice absorb the liquid, then serve.

Note:
If using jarred or canned beans, see Using canned/jarred legumes. Reduce the added fresh water to 6 cups (1.4 liters), and proceed with the next step as soon as it begins to boil. Add the cooked beans to the casserole when you add the rice.

Arròs amb Bledes

Kebbet Laa'tin

Pumpkin Kibbeh

Lebanon

Raw, fried, boiled, baked, layered, stuffed—*kibbeh* comes in many shapes and forms. Most often, it's a combination of ground meat, bulgur wheat, and spices. So how did pumpkin come to play a part?

When explorers first brought pumpkins from the New World to Spain, Sephardic Jews welcomed them in their diets, and took them from Europe to northern Africa and the Middle East. Following their arrival in what is now Lebanon, pumpkins became an inexpensive way of replacing meat for economic means and dietary restrictions. Pumpkin *kibbeh* was born. Since that time, it has become an integral part of the Lebanese kitchen and a popular centerpiece—especially if paired with a fresh Tabbouleh.

ACTIVE TIME 1 hour 40 minutes
TOTAL TIME 2 hours 45 minutes
SERVES 6–8

Pumpkin casing

- 4lb (1.8kg) pumpkin (2¾lb/ 1.25kg peeled, seeded weight)
- 1 large onion, about 7oz (200g)
- 1 orange
- 14oz (400g) fine bulgur
- 2 tbsp Kibbeh Spice Blend (two-thirds of the blend below)
- ½ tsp ground turmeric
- 1 tbsp salt
- 2 tbsp all-purpose flour

Lebanese 7-spice blend (optional)

- 1 tsp allspice berries
- 1 tsp black peppercorns
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 1 tsp coriander seeds
- ½ tsp cloves
- 1 small cinnamon stick
- ½ tsp freshly grated nutmeg

Kibbeh spice blend

- 2 tsp cumin seeds
- 1 tsp dried rose petals
- 1 tsp dried marjoram
- 1 tsp dried basil
- 1 tsp dried mint
- 2 tbsp Lebanese 7-spice blend (from above or store-bought)

Red onion filling

- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for greasing
- 4 large red onions, about 1¾lb (800g)
- 10oz (300g) swiss chard
- 1 tbsp salt
- 14oz (400g) can of chickpeas
- 1 tbsp Kibbeh Spice Blend (one-third of the blend opposite)
- 1 tsp cayenne pepper
- 2 tbsp sumac

- 3½oz (100g) walnuts
- 3 tbsp pomegranate molasses

For the casing, halve the pumpkin, remove and discard the seeds, and cut into wedges. Peel the wedges and cut into chunks. Place them in a large pan, cover generously with water, bring to a boil then simmer, covered, for 20 minutes, or until knife tender. Drain, and let it steam and drive off moisture for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, peel the onion, and use a small food processor to chop it very finely. Set aside.

For the 7-spice blend, toast the first six spices in a dry frying pan until aromatic. Set aside to cool, then transfer to a spice grinder. Grate in the nutmeg and grind to a fine powder. This makes more than needed, but you can store what's left over in a jar for several months.

For the *kibbeh* spice blend, toast the cumin seeds in a dry frying pan, set aside to cool, then grind them to a fine powder with the remaining ingredients.

To make the filling, heat the oil in a casserole. Peel and thinly slice the onions, and add to the hot oil. Roughly tear the chard leaves and finely chop the stems. Add the stems and salt to the onions, and sauté until the onions have softened (5–10 minutes). Stir in the chard leaves until wilted, then drain the chickpeas and add them to the pan, along with 1 tablespoon of the *kibbeh* spice blend, cayenne pepper, and sumac. Cook for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, while you roughly chop the walnuts; stir them in along with the pomegranate molasses. Turn off the heat.

To finish the casing, transfer the pumpkin to a large bowl and mash to a smooth purée. Grate in the zest of the orange, then stir in the onion, bulgur, 2 tablespoons of the *kibbeh* spice blend, turmeric, salt, and 3½ tablespoons (50ml) of water. Set aside for 10 minutes to soften the bulgur, then knead in the flour to form a soft dough.

Time to assemble. Preheat the oven to 400°F(200°C) and grease two 8in (20cm) round baking pans with olive oil. Add one-quarter of the *kibbeh* dough to each round pan, and flatten it to a smooth layer. Cover each equally with the onion filling. Shape handfuls of the remaining dough into flat disks, and place them on top of the filling, pressing them together until the surface is covered.

Coat the surface with a little olive oil, then use a knife to score a diamond pattern into the top layer. Bake for 40 minutes, rotating the pans halfway through to ensure even cooking. Remove from the pans and serve, ideally alongside freshly made Tabbouleh.

Note:

If you don't have two round baking pans, you can bake the kibbeh *in a 12½ x 8½in (32 x 24cm) rectangular pan.*

Kebbet Laa’tin

Mujaddara

Lentils & Rice with Caramelized Onions

Levant

The right way to make *mujaddara* (*mdardara* in Lebanon; *megadarra* in Egypt) varies across the Levant. Some cooks insist that it is seasoned with nothing but salt, while most versions include a little bit of ground cumin, to aid digestion, as well as black pepper. I like the added complexity of cinnamon, common in some households.

The secret to a flavorsome *mujaddara* is carefully caramelized onions, which are used as a topping and mixed through the rice and lentils to accentuate their rich flavor. A simple farmer's salad such as Salata Falahiyeh is usually served right on top of the *mujaddara* so the tanginess of the dressing and the crunch of the vegetables mingle with the rice and lentils.

ACTIVE TIME 45 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 15 minutes
SERVES 4

- ⅔ cup (150ml) extra virgin olive oil
- 3 large onions, about 1lb 5oz (600g) in total
- 8½oz (240g) basmati rice
- 1 tbsp plus ¼ tsp salt
- 11oz (320g) brown lentils
- 1½ tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper

Heat 4 tablespoons of the olive oil in a large saucepan for which you have a lid, over medium-low heat. Peel and finely chop one of the onions, and sauté until golden all over (10–15 minutes).

Meanwhile, rinse the rice until the water runs almost clear, then cover with fresh water, and let it soak while you proceed with the recipe.

Peel, halve, and slice the remaining onions, and line a cooling rack with paper towel. Heat the remaining oil in a frying pan over medium-low heat, then fry the onions until dark golden (20–30 minutes), stirring them often. Strain them into a sieve placed over a bowl to catch the oil (reserve it for later), then transfer the onions onto the cooling rack, and sprinkle with ¼ teaspoon of the salt.

Once the chopped onions in the saucepan are golden, rinse the lentils under running water; set aside. Add the cumin, cinnamon, and black pepper to the saucepan, heat through for 1 minute, then tip in the lentils and 4 cups minus 3 tablespoons (900ml) of water. Bring to a boil, move to the lowest heat and simmer, covered, for 20 minutes, or until the lentils are almost tender.

Drain the rice, and mix it into the lentils along with the remaining 1 tablespoon of salt. Return to a boil, then reduce the heat again, and simmer, covered, for 12 minutes more. You can prepare the salad in the meantime, if making.

Turn off the heat, keep the lid on the pan, and let the *mujaddara* steam for a final 10 minutes. Remove the lid, drizzle in the reserved onion oil, and gently fold it through. Serve on a large tray, topped with the crispy onions, ideally alongside the Salata Falahiyeh.

Note:
In the south of Lebanon, mujaddara *is commonly prepared with coarse bulgur instead of white rice, giving it a wholesome, nutty flavor. Swap the rice with bulgur (no need to rinse and soak) and follow the recipe as above.*

Mujaddara

Idli

Fermented Rice & Lentil Cakes

India

Fluffy, cloudlike "cakes" made from a fermented rice and lentil batter, *idli* are an iconic south Indian breakfast that can be enjoyed any time of day. In Bengaluru, no one makes them quite like "idli king" Krishnan Mahadevan. Here, in India's answer to Silicon Valley, workers queue up as early as 7:00 a.m. to devour them, freshly steamed and presented on a piece of banana leaf. The leaf is not just for show. Krishnan explained that most dishes in south India are served this way because the heat of the food warms up the leaf, releasing a pleasant aroma that stimulates the appetite.

ACTIVE TIME 35 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 25 minutes, plus 4 hours soaking and 8–24 hours fermenting
SERVES 4

- 10oz (300g) idli rice
- 3½oz (100g) urad dal (husked black gram)
- 1oz (30g) thin or medium poha (flattened rice)
- 1 tsp fenugreek seeds
- vegetable oil for greasing
- 1 tsp salt

To serve
- Thengai Chutney
- Sambar

Special equipment
- stainless steel idli stand
- large lidded saucepan, big enough to hold the stand with the lid on

Put the rice in a bowl, rinse three times in fresh water, then soak in 3 cups (700ml) of fresh water for 3–4 hours. In a separate bowl, rinse the *urad* dal, *poha*, and fenugreek seeds once in water, then soak in 3 cups (700ml) of fresh water for 3–4 hours. Drain the rice, but save the soaking water, then blend the rice and ½–⅔ cup (130–150ml) of the reserved water to a slightly grainy paste, only adding more water if it doesn't blend at all. The paste should fall in thick ribbons when drizzled with a spoon. Transfer to a large bowl.

Drain the *urad* dal, *poha* and fenugreek seeds, saving the soaking water, then blend them and 5 tbsp–½ cup (80–120ml) of the reserved water to a smooth paste (a spoonful dropped in a bowl of water should float). Add it to the rice paste, and mix well with your hands to start the fermentation. Cover the bowl, and let it ferment for 8–24 hours in a warm place (such as the oven with the light switched on). The fermented

batter should have risen in volume and smell tangy (if the batter has not risen, stir in ¼ teaspoon baking soda right before steaming). Store fermented batter in the fridge for up to 5 days.

Make the Thengai Chutney and Sambar.

To steam the *idli*, pour enough water into a large saucepan to generously cover the base without touching the *idli* stand; bring to a simmer. Meanwhile, lightly grease the *idli* molds with oil. Add the salt to the batter and gently mix it through. Fill each mold three-quarters full with the batter. Place the molds in the pan, bring to a boil, reduce the heat to medium and steam, covered, with the lid slightly ajar, for 10 minutes. Turn off the heat and let them steam for 2 minutes more or until a skewer inserted comes out clean. Take the molds out of the pan, allow to rest for 10 minutes, then remove the *idli* with your hands.

Continue with the rest and serve with the Thengai Chutney and Sambar. Leftover *idli* will keep, covered in the fridge, for up to 3 days. They taste great when broken into pieces and pan-fried in a little oil until golden.

Note:
Idli *rice has previously been parboiled and is ideal for fluffy* idli*. You can use basmati but will need to add around 2 tablespoons (30ml) less water when grinding.*

Idli

Bengaluru-Style Masala Dosa

Rice & Lentil Pancake with Potato Stuffing

India

Step into Bengaluru's Vidyarthi Bhavan restaurant and you're immersed in the atmosphere of one of south India's most quintessential establishments. Fans hum silently below the wooden ceiling, stainless-steel cups are stacked on the marble-top tables, and vintage photographs adorn the walls. "We're custodians of memories," the owner told me proudly, referring to the room filled with people of all ages, from students to seniors.

They flock here with one thing on their mind. *Dosa*. At first, you might think of the larger-than-plate, paper-thin version of the south Indian staple, but here in the capital of Karnataka, Vidyarthi Bhavan serves what many deem to be the one and only, the original *dosa*. It's spread out into a thicker but smaller pancake, flavored with a layer of fragrant potato *masala* and cooked until deep-golden brown.

Traditionally eaten by hand, the most joyous moment is when you crack through the crispy outer layer right in the center, scoop up a generous mouthful of the filling, and dunk it into the *thengai* (coconut) chutney. It's south India's most famous breakfast (but also makes a great lunch or dinner). Served alongside strong filter coffee, it's a surefire way to kick your day into gear.

ACTIVE TIME 1 hour 20 minutes
TOTAL TIME 2 hours, plus 4 hours soaking and 8–24 hours fermenting
MAKES 8 (serves 4)

Dosa

- 5½oz (150g) idli rice
- 5½oz (150g) sona masoori rice or basmati rice
- 3½oz (100g) urad dal (husked black gram)
- 1oz (30g) chana dal
- ¾oz (20g) thin or medium poha (flattened rice)
- ½ tsp fenugreek seeds
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 small onion
- 2–3 tbsp vegetable oil for greasing

Masala

- 4 floury potatoes, about 1lb 2oz (500g) in total
- 1 tbsp plus 1 tsp salt
- 1 large onion, about 7oz (200g)
- ¾oz (20g) fresh root ginger
- 2 green finger chiles
- 15–20 curry leaves

- ½oz (15g) cilantro
- 3 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 tbsp chana dal
- 1 tsp brown mustard seeds
- ¼ tsp asafetida
- ⅓ tsp ground turmeric
- ½ tsp golden granulated sugar

To serve
- Thengai Chutney

The day before, make the batter following the method for *Idli* but using the first six ingredients listed here, and adding the *sona masoori* (or basmati) rice to the *idli* rice, and the *chana* dal to the *urad* dal. Blend each paste until easily pourable. You might need to add another 2–3 tablespoons of water to the dal mixture. Let the mixture ferment for 8–24 hours in a warm place, such as the oven with the light switched on.

To make the *masala*, put the potatoes in a lidded saucepan, cover with water, season with 1 tablespoon of the salt, bring to a boil and simmer, with the lid left slightly ajar, for 30–40 minutes or until knife tender. Drain, allow to cool, then peel and mash coarsely.

While the potatoes are cooling, peel and thinly slice the onion; peel and finely grate the ginger; trim and finely slice the chiles; pick the curry leaves; trim and discard the lower stems of the cilantro, and thinly chop the rest.

Heat the oil in a frying pan over medium-low heat. Add the *chana* dal and, as soon as it begins to sizzle, the mustard seeds. Sauté until the dal is lightly golden or the seeds start to pop (2–3 minutes). Stir in the asafetida, then tip in the sliced onion and curry leaves, and continue frying until the onion is lightly golden as well (5–6 minutes). Add the ginger and chiles, and cook for 1 minute more, then add the turmeric, sugar, the remaining 1 teaspoon of salt, and 1 cup plus 1 tablespoon (250ml) of water. Mix well, bring to a boil, and stir in the potatoes. The mixture should be easily spreadable, so add more water if necessary. Turn off the heat, mix in the cilantro, and set aside. Next, make the chutney.

To make the *dosa*, heat a cast-iron or nonstick pan over medium-high heat (I use two alongside each other to reduce total cooking time). Add the 1 teaspoon of salt to the *dosa* batter, and if necessary, some water (around 3 tablespoons), to achieve a thick pouring consistency similar to a pancake batter. Give the batter a good mix to stir out some of the air, otherwise it won't spread evenly.

Once the pan is hot, turn the heat to low. For the nonstick pan, don't add any oil at all. For the cast-iron pan, you need to reinforce a nonstick layer: cut the small onion in half and add a splash of water to the pan. It should dance in small droplets over the surface before evaporating, otherwise heat it a little longer. Wipe the pan clean with a folded paper towel, then add 2–3 drops of oil, and spread it out with the cut side of the onion (you can pierce it with a fork and use the fork as a handle) to create a nonstick coating.

Pour a ladle of the batter into the hot pan, spreading it out to a circle with the back of the ladle. If it doesn't spread, the batter might be too thick (add more water), or the pan might be too hot (let it cool a little). Drizzle another teaspoon of oil around the edges and over the *dosa*. Cook until the bottom is dark golden and the surface looks cooked through (6–8 minutes).

Add the *masala* on one side and fold the *dosa* over into a semicircle. Transfer to a plate, wipe the pan clean with a folded paper towel, and continue with the rest, repeating the nonstick coating for the cast-iron pan. You should have enough batter to make eight *dosa*. Serve by itself or with the chutney.

Note:
Idli *rice has previously been parboiled and gives* dosa *its fluffy center and crispy exterior. You can use plain raw rice such as basmati instead, but you'll need to add around 2 tablespoons (30ml) less water when grinding the rice, and the* dosa *won't be quite as crispy.*

Bengaluru-Style Masala Dosa

Uttapam

Fermented Rice & Lentil Pancake

India

Like Idli and Dosa, *uttapam* is a south Indian breakfast staple made from the magical combination of fermented ground rice and lentils. These thick pancakes are often prepared at home and are also a popular street food. As you watch vendors ladle the batter onto large *tawas* (hot plates), you can only marvel at the universal allure of pancakes; made the world over, they always reflect the flavors, methods, and traditions of the local culture. What an exciting reminder of the abundance and richness of this planet.

I have used a handful of traditional aromatics in this recipe, but every time I make a batch I muse over the endless possibilities with which *uttapam* could be topped. A challenge that I shall leave in your hands.

You will need to start the recipe the day before to have the batter fermented and ready to go.

ACTIVE TIME 45 minutes
TOTAL TIME 45 minutes
SERVES 4 for a light breakfast/lunch

- 1 portion Idli Batter
- 1½ tsp salt
- 1 large red onion, about 7oz (200g)
- 1 large tomato, about 5½oz (150g)
- 2 green finger chiles
- 1oz (30g) cilantro
- 4 tbsp vegetable oil

To serve

- Milagai Podi (optional)
- Hari Chutney (optional)

The day before, make the Idli Batter and leave it to ferment (see Idli). Once fermented, gently mix in 1 teaspoon of the salt and enough water (around 3½ tablespoons/50ml) to create a pouring consistency that is similar to a pancake batter.

Prepare the aromatics: peel and finely cube the red onion; cube the tomato; thinly slice the chiles; and trim and discard the lower stems of the cilantro, and chop the rest. Mix them together in a bowl with the remaining ½ teaspoon of salt.

Preheat a nonstick frying pan over medium heat and brush it with 1 teaspoon of the oil. Pour in one-quarter of the batter (1 large ladle) and spread it out into a thick pancake, then reduce the heat to medium-low. Once bubbles start to form on the surface, sprinkle over one-quarter of the topping mixture

and press it in lightly with a spatula. Drizzle another 1 teaspoon of oil over the *uttapam* and around the edges, then continue frying until the base is golden and easily loosens (3–4 minutes).

Gently flip it with a spatula and fry the other side until the vegetables are lightly charred (3–4 minutes), pressing it down again to cook it evenly. Flip it one more time, then slide it onto a plate and cover with a clean kitchen towel to keep it warm. Carry on with the rest of the batter and topping.

Serve sprinkled with Milagai Podi, or alternatively, serve with Hari Chutney for dipping.

Uttapam

Falafel Pita

Chickpea Fritter Pita

Israel

Hummus, falafel, and pita have deep roots in Middle Eastern food history, but it wasn't until the 1950s that these ingredients came together in a single, handheld "sandwich." Yemeni immigrants arriving in Israel brought their food culture with them, transforming falafel into a popular local dish. Inspired by a thicker Yemeni bread called *salouf*, they created a softer, fluffier version of pita, which became the perfect vessel to combine traditional Arabic staples into a quick street-food dish. Making all the elements from scratch is somewhat of a kitchen marathon, but a few store-bought shortcuts are easily forgiven.

ACTIVE TIME 35 minutes
TOTAL TIME 35 minutes
SERVES 4

- 4 Pitas
- Hummus
- Tahini Sauce
- 16 Falafel balls

Schug

- 1oz (30g) cilantro
- 1oz (30g) parsley
- 2 garlic cloves
- 2 green chiles (such as cayenne or jalapeño)
- ⅓ tsp ground cardamom (from 6 cardamom pods)
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- ⅓ tsp salt
- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp lemon juice

Filling

- 2 large tomatoes, 10oz (300g) in total
- 1 Persian cucumber (or ⅓ English cucumber), about 5½oz (150g)
- 1 small onion, about 2¾oz (80g)
- 1¼oz (40g) parsley
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- ¼ tsp salt
- 2 pickled cucumbers

Start by making the Pita, Hummus, Tahini Sauce, and Falafel balls.

For the *schug*, trim and discard the lower stems of the cilantro and parsley, and roughly chop the rest. Peel and roughly chop the garlic; and trim and roughly chop the green chiles. Put everything into the bowl of a small food processor and add the ground spices and salt. Pulse until finely chopped, then stir in the olive oil and lemon juice. The lemon juice will discolor the *schug* after a while, so only add this as close to serving as possible.

For the filling, cube the tomatoes and cucumber, and peel and thinly slice the onion, putting them in a bowl as you go. Trim and discard the lower stems of the parsley, finely chop the rest, and add most of it to the bowl, reserving some to serve. Add the lemon juice and salt, and toss the salad with your hands to mix evenly. Cut the pickled cucumbers lengthwise into quarters and set aside.

Make an incision in the pita breads and open them like a small pocket. Spread a thick layer of hummus inside, followed by two falafel balls and a drizzle of the tahini sauce (add extra if not using hummus). Add some of the salad, pickled cucumbers, and *schug*, then repeat with another two falafel balls, salad, and pickled cucumbers. Finish with a generous drizzle of the tahini sauce, a dollop of *schug,* and the reserved parsley.

Falafel Pita

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Vegetables

One of the biggest misconceptions attached to a vegan diet is that it revolves entirely around vegetables. We've all seen the satirical images of plates filled with nothing but plain lettuce leaves. Of course, it goes without saying that vegetables play an important role in a plant-based diet. After all, the word "vegan" derives from the first and last syllables of "vegetarian," which itself links "vegetable" with the suffix "-arian," to mean someone who supports or advocates... vegetables.

But it's a linguistic misfortune that has set in motion the idea that a vegan diet is limited to a single food group, and that vegetables, above all else, are a suitable substitute for animal-based proteins. In "veganized" dishes, carrots are thinly shaved to mimic salmon, celeriacs metamorphose into schnitzels, and balanced stir-fries transform into a medley that spans the harvest of all four seasons.

These veganized alternatives feed a misunderstanding of what a modern plant-based diet actually is, and help explain why many cultural groups who might shun the consumption of animal products may nonetheless oppose the idea of considering themselves or their dishes "vegan." Yet it's these groups that have long demonstrated a different approach. Throughout history, when people have adapted traditional dishes to suit periods of fasting or economic constraints, vegetables are rarely used *in place of* meat or fish. Instead, legumes, nuts, and even grains are used to create sustaining alternatives, and meals in their own right.

Across these cultures, vegetables play a different role, and have long been a source of considerable pride. It is said that Turkish parents pass down at least a dozen eggplant recipes to their children before they consider them fit for independence. But vegetables also have something that grains, legumes, and nuts can't provide: seasonal allure. For many, spring heralds the arrival of artichokes and delicacies such as Carciofi alla Romana. Summer is the time for showing off eggplants in Caponata, but request this dish during other months and most Italians will roll their eyes. Fall and winter are long-awaited along the Aegean coast, because with pumpkins being in their prime, highlights such as Sinkonta finally make an appearance again.

Yet most of these dishes are not intended as a main course. They can be that missing element that makes a meal memorable, like serving a tangy Salata Falahiyeh to cut through the rich flavors of Mujaddara; or simply a form of comfort, like the velvety texture of flash-fried eggplants in Yu Xiang Qiezi and the creaminess of a properly prepared Swabian Kartoffelsalat. Whatever the occasion, they should not be seen as a substitute, but as an opportunity to fill the table with vibrant colors, flavors, and textures —the product of the gifts of the seasons.

Schwäbischer Kartoffelsalat: *Swabian Potato Salad*
Caponata: *Sicilian Eggplant Relish*
Carciofi alla Romana: *Roman Braised Artichokes*
Turşu: *Lacto-Fermented Vegetables*
Sinkonta: *Roasted Pumpkin & Onions*
Tabbouleh: *Chopped Parsley Salad*
Salata Falahiyeh: *Farmer's Salad*
Vada Pav: *Spiced Potato Fritter Rolls*
Sambar: *Lentil & Vegetable Stew*
Yu Xiang Qiezi: *"Fish-Fragrant" Eggplants*
Gudeg Jogja: *Jackfruit Stew*
Yachaejeon: *Vegetable Pancakes*

Schwäbischer Kartoffelsalat

Swabian Potato Salad

Germany

German potato salad has gained popularity far beyond the country's borders, yet the dish's regional nuances tend to be overlooked. Visit northern Germany, and you'll most likely find mayonnaise in the dressing. But venture to Swabia in the south, and *kartoffelsalat* is a balanced affair of stock, vinegar, mustard, and oil.

Locals may wag their finger at me for not using beef stock, but with good-quality, store-bought stock becoming more expensive, it is common for home cooks to opt for a vegetable-based broth instead. The one golden rule on which every *Schwabe* will agree is that the final dish has to be *schlonzig*, a local slang that describes the "creamy" sound a properly dressed potato salad ought to make.

ACTIVE TIME 50 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 50 minutes
SERVES 4 as a side

- 2¼lb (1kg) small waxy potatoes
- 1¾ tbsp salt
- 1 small onion, about 3½oz (100g)
- 1 cup plus 1 tbsp (250ml) vegetable stock
- 3½ tbsp white wine vinegar
- pinch of black pepper
- 1 tbsp German mustard (or Dijon mustard)
- 4 tbsp vegetable oil
- ½oz (15g) chives

Put the potatoes and 1 tablespoon of the salt in a saucepan, cover with water, and bring to a boil. Simmer for 20 minutes or until almost knife tender. Drain, leave to cool slightly, then peel while warm. Slice the potatoes thinly and put them in a large bowl.

Peel and finely dice the onion, and put in a saucepan with the stock, vinegar, black pepper, and remaining ¾ tablespoon of salt. Once the potatoes are sliced, bring the liquid in the pan to a simmer, then turn off the heat and stir in the mustard.

Pour the dressing over the potatoes and mix gently to coat evenly. Cover with a plate and leave to soak up the flavors for at least 1 hour, carefully mixing it 2–3 times during that time.

Before serving, gently fold in the oil. Finely chop the chives and mix most of them through. Divide among plates, and garnish with the remaining chives.

Schwäbischer Kartoffelsalat

Caponata

Sicilian Eggplant Relish

Italy

Caponata's origins are anything but plant-based. The word itself comes from "*capone*," the Sicilian dialect for *lampuga*, a type of fish that was favored by aristocrats and served in a sweet-and-sour sauce. Those who weren't able to afford this luxury used eggplants instead, giving rise to the early stages of *caponata* as we know it today. Since then, it has evolved, and there are now vast regional differences across the island.

Some cooks use an equal mix of peppers, eggplants, and potatoes, others add cacao powder as the secret touch. I prefer the rich tomato sauce common in Palermo. Yet, despite the differences, most Sicilians will rejoice over the true essence of *caponata*: golden, fried eggplants served in an *agrodolce* sauce—a simple mix of sugar and vinegar that gives the dish its balance of sweet and sour from which it all started.

ACTIVE TIME 50 minutes
TOTAL TIME 50 minutes
SERVES 4 as a side or as a main with bread

- 2 large eggplants, about 1¾lb (800g)
- 1 tbsp plus 1 tsp salt
- 1oz (30g) salted capers (or use brined)
- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 large onion, about 7oz (200g)
- 4 celery stalks, about 9oz (250g)
- 2oz (60g) green olives
- 2 cups plus 2 tbsp (500ml) olive oil for deep-frying
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 9oz (250g) crushed and sieved tomatoes
- 1½ tbsp golden granulated sugar
- 2 tbsp white wine vinegar
- scant 1oz (25g) basil (optional)

Cut the eggplants into 1¼–1½in (3–4cm) chunks, season with 1 tablespoon of the salt, and transfer to a colander placed in the sink, to draw out some of the moisture and bitter flavor notes. You can skip this step if roasting the eggplants (see Note).

Meanwhile, soak the salted capers in a bowl of water (for brined, simply drain). Heat the extra virgin olive oil in a frying pan, then peel and finely chop the onion, thinly slice the celery, and sauté both in the oil until the onion turns golden (10–12 minutes). Stone the olives and tear them into pieces. Heat the deep-frying oil in a wide saucepan to 355°F (180°C). To check if it's hot enough, place the end of a wooden spoon into the oil; there should be tiny bubbles rising rapidly to the surface. Line a rack with paper towel.

Drain and rinse the capers, and stir them into the frying pan along with the olives, then tip in the tomato paste, crushed and sieved tomatoes, remaining 1 teaspoon of salt, and 6½ tablespoons (100ml) of water. Simmer for 15 minutes more until most of the liquid has evaporated.

Meanwhile, pat the eggplant pieces dry with paper towel, then fry half of them in the hot oil until golden, flipping them occasionally (8–10 minutes). The oil will cool down after adding the eggplant, so keep it over high heat until it comes back to temperature. Transfer to the lined rack and continue with the rest. Once finished, let the oil cool off entirely, then strain it through a sieve and use it for cooking in other recipes.

Add the sugar and vinegar to the frying pan, and cook for 1 minute more, then tear in the basil, gently stir in the fried eggplants, and turn off the heat. Allow to cool to room temperature before serving. It will taste even better the next day.

Note:
To roast the eggplants, season the chunks with only 1 teaspoon of salt, and roast, at 425°F (220°C) for 30 minutes or until golden.

Caponata

Carciofi alla Romana

Roman Braised Artichokes

Italy

Artichokes. The bane of many home cooks, yet one of the vegetable world's most precious gems. There are countless varieties of globe artichokes, and reading instructions on how to prepare them can sound surgical. It's not surprising: the tough, thorny outer leaves, known as bracts, are a natural protection against herbivores, while the infamous, inner hairy part, the choke, is the safeguarded flower itself. But with the help of some visual cues (see pictures), tackling them need not be intimidating.

Romans usually use the *mammola* variety, which requires a little less trimming, having tender inner bracts and an underdeveloped choke. Other types of globe artichokes make for an equally elegant plate, and learning how to prepare them will reward you with one of the most iconic flavors of the Eternal City.

ACTIVE TIME 50 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 10 minutes
SERVES 4 as a light side

- 2 lemons
- 8 small or 4 large globe artichokes, around 3lb 14oz (1.75kg) in total
- ½oz (15g) parsley
- ½oz (15g) mint
- 3 large garlic cloves
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling

Fill a large bowl with cold water, cut one of the lemons in half and add it to the bowl, squeezing the juice into the water. Cut the other lemon in half and set aside.

Prepare the artichokes: beware that they might stain your hands, so use rubber gloves if preferred. Peel away the outer bracts to reveal the tender yellow ones around the heart (the wide base from where the bracts grow). Trim and discard all but 1¼–1½in (3–4cm) of the stem, then use a paring knife to peel the rest of the stem by generously removing the tougher outer layers to a point where it's tender to cut. Trim off any stubborn, dark green bits left over from the bracts.

Use a serrated knife to cut off the tender bracts ¾–1¼in (2–3cm) above from where they meet the heart, or where they begin to darken in color. Use a teaspoon to scrape out the choke and any thinner purple leaves. Rub the artichoke and stem with the halved lemon, and place it in the water to prevent it from discoloring. Repeat with the remaining artichokes.

Trim and discard the lower stems of the parsley, pick the mint leaves, and finely chop both. Peel and finely grate or crush the garlic, and mix it with the herbs, salt, and pepper.

Put the olive oil in a casserole that is just large enough to fit all the artichokes side by side, snugly. Drain an artichoke and rub a bit of the herb and garlic mixture all over it, packing most of it into the hollowed choke. Place it in the oil, stem up, and repeat with the rest.

Turn on the heat to medium, and once the oil begins to sizzle vigorously, carefully add enough water to cover the bottom ½in (1cm) of the pan, roughly scant 1–1¼ cups (200–300ml). Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to low and simmer, covered, for 20–30 minutes, or until the artichokes are knife tender. Serve on a tray or plates, spoon over some of the braising liquid, and drizzle with olive oil.

Notes:

⚫ *If the bracts are ferociously tough to peel and you're having trouble trimming the stem, chances are the artichoke is too old. You can still use it, but you'll most likely only be able to eat the heart, as the leaves and stem won't get tender when cooked.*

⚫ *If you don't have a casserole tall enough to hold the artichokes with their stems, scrunch up some parchment paper under a running faucet, then drape it over and around the artichokes to create a makeshift lid.*

Carciofi alla Romana

Turşu

Lacto-Fermented Vegetables

Türkiye

Kimchi and sauerkraut are ferments that have taken the world by storm, especially since the surge of health-boosting probiotic foods. Yet Türkiye's *turşu* are less familiar. They're referred to as "Turkish pickles," so one might expect vegetables preserved in a vinegar solution, but *turşu* are in fact lacto-fermented pickles, and an essential part of the Turkish diet.

A stroll through İstanbul's streets will inevitably lead past a *turşu* shop displaying nothing but large jars filled with vividly colored vegetables, while market vendors sell them straight from the vat. A restaurant meal is rarely complete unless it is accompanied by a small bowl of pickles, or even a glass of turnip-pickling liquid called *şalgam suyu*, which is also a popular hangover cure. Wherever you go, a healthy dose of probiotic *turşu* is likely to be within reach.

They are easy to make at home, with a few optional steps to take them to the next level. Bay leaves (or traditionally, fresh vine leaves), containing tannin, are a clever addition to preserve the crunch of the vegetables, while chickpeas help to speed up the fermentation. To experience *turşu*'s potential, try pairing them with Kuru Fasulye and Şehriyeli Pilav.

ACTIVE TIME 20 minutes
TOTAL TIME 20 minutes, plus sterilizing jars and 2 weeks fermenting
MAKES 1 quart/32oz (1 liter) jar

- 5 large garlic cloves
- 5 dried chickpeas (optional)
- 1lb 2oz–2¼lb (500g–1kg) firm vegetable of your choice, or a mix (such as gherkins, green tomatoes, carrots, turnips, beets, cauliflower, cabbage, okra); weight varies depending on vegetable
- 2 bay leaves (optional)
- scant 1oz (25g) rock salt
- 3½ tbsp grape or apple cider vinegar

Special equipment

- 1-quart/32-oz (1-liter) rubber-sealed glass jar (see Notes)

To sterilize the jar, preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C) and bring a pan of water to a boil. Wash the jar, lid, and rubber seal in hot, soapy water. Drain well, then place the jar with its lid on a roasting pan and transfer to the oven for 15 minutes, or until dry. Remove from the oven and let it cool to room temperature. Meanwhile, boil the rubber seal for 2–3 minutes, then remove with tongs and air-dry on a clean kitchen towel.

To make the *turşu*, peel the garlic cloves and put 2–3 in the jar along with the dried chickpeas, if using. Wash and peel (if necessary) your vegetables, then either leave whole or cut into bite-sized chunks, slices, or thick sticks. Add the vegetables, bay leaves, and remaining garlic cloves to the jar, pressing everything down to pack it as tightly as possible. Finally, sprinkle in the salt.

In a jug, combine the vinegar with 2 cups plus 2 tbsp (500ml) of water, and pour the mixture over the vegetables to cover them completely. You won't need all of the liquid. Close the jar and gently twist it a few times to distribute the salt.

Place the jug on a tray to catch any overspill and let it ferment at room temperature in a dark place for 1–2 weeks (see Notes), without opening it at all. You might notice a white sediment on the bottom of the jar and on some of the vegetables. This is just yeast and is completely normal.

Open the jar carefully. You should be able to hear the air escape and see bubbles rise rapidly to the surface—signs of a healthy fermentation. Refrigerate, and consume within 2 months.

Notes:

- ⚫ *I prefer using clip-top jars with a separate rubber layer (such as the Kilner brand), which allow any excess pressure to escape naturally without having to "burp" the jar during the 1–2 weeks. For other jars, sterilize rubber-lined lids in boiling water, tighten the lid only loosely, and make sure to use a fermentation weight to keep the vegetables below the surface of the brine.*
- ⚫ *As a general rule, you want to aim for a 2% salt brine. To calculate this more precisely, first weigh your empty jar, then add all of the ingredients including the water and vinegar solution (but not the salt), and weigh again. Now multiply the weight difference by 0.02 for the amount of salt you should add to the jar.*
- ⚫ *The speed of the fermentation depends on the ambient temperature. Leave the pickles to ferment for longer during colder months and for a little less time during summer.*
- ⚫ *Don't waste the leftover fermented liquid. Serve a small glass of it alongside the pickle. It's loaded with probiotics, and just like the* turşu*, has been used to aid digestion since the Ottoman era.*

Turşu

Sinkonta

Roasted Pumpkin & Onions

Türkiye

To many, Türkiye is known as the land of grilled meats, filo pastries stuffed with cheese, and buttery desserts, but much Turkish cuisine is dedicated to cooking with plants. An entire category called *zeytinyağlılar* describes dishes that are made with olive oil, and most of them revolve around simple ways to make use of seasonal ingredients, from artichokes to eggplants, from green beans to zucchini. Name a vegetable, and there's most likely a *zeytinyağlılar* way to cook it.

These dishes are especially popular along the Aegean coast, where olive groves and a variety of vegetables grow in abundance in the Mediterranean climate. In the town of Urla, chef Handan Kaygusuzer showed me how to cook *sinkonta* after visiting the morning market. It's a dish so simple, I realized there and then that *zeytinyağlılar* are really a celebration of the treasures of the land. Choose the ripest produce, treat it with the bare minimum, and let time and heat transform it into something magical.

ACTIVE TIME 20 minutes
TOTAL TIME 50 minutes
SERVES 4 as a side

- ¼–½ Turkish pumpkin (about 2¼lb/1kg untrimmed weight), or use butternut squash
- 1 large onion, about 7oz (200g)
- 5 large garlic cloves
- 1 Turkish long red pepper or Romano or bell pepper, about 3½oz (100g)
- 5 tbsp (75ml) extra virgin olive oil plus extra to serve
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tsp golden granulated sugar

Preheat the oven to 410°F (210°C).

Remove and discard the seeds and stringy flesh from the pumpkin. Cut it into 2½–2¾in (6–7cm) wide wedges, peel them, and chop into ¼in (5mm) slices until you have 1lb 9oz (700g) of prepared pumpkin. Peel and cut the onion into ¼in (5mm) slices; peel the garlic cloves; and trim and thickly slice the pepper (core it if using bell pepper). Add everything to a large mixing bowl as you go. Add the olive oil, tomato paste, salt, and pepper, and mix well with your hands to coat evenly.

Transfer everything to a large, 14 x 10½in (36 x 26cm) baking dish or pan and spread it evenly into a thin layer, then sprinkle over the sugar and roast for 30 minutes, until the pumpkin is tender and the onions and peppers are slightly charred.

Divide among plates, and drizzle with a little extra olive oil before serving.

Sinkonta

Tabbouleh

Chopped Parsley Salad

Lebanon

An abundance of very finely chopped parsley, a punchy tanginess from the lemon juice, and a gentle nuttiness from the bulgur—these are the qualities that mark a good *tabbouleh*. It's often mistakenly referred to as a bulgur salad, but it's the herbs that reign supreme—and the job of chopping them finely is not taken lightly. In each family, there's usually one member who does it most meticulously, and who proudly takes on the honorable task.

I've shared my tips on how to chop the herbs in the method here, but if you're pressed for time, don't fret. In the end, *tabbouleh* is simply meant to be a refreshing *meze*-style salad that is bound to put a smile on people's faces. It's often scooped onto lettuce leaves, or served with Hummus and Pita, but I love how it cuts through the heartier flavors of Kebbet Laa'tin.

ACTIVE TIME 45 minutes
TOTAL TIME 50 minutes
SERVES 4 as a side

- 4 tbsp fine brown or yellow bulgur
- 4 tbsp plus 2 tsp (70ml) lemon juice
- 2 tomatoes, about 7oz (200g) in total
- 7oz (200g) parsley
- 1oz (30g) mint
- 4 scallions
- 5 tbsp (75ml) extra virgin olive oil
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper

Put the bulgur and lemon juice in a medium bowl and give them a stir. Finely cube the tomatoes and place them on top of the bulgur, but do not mix them in. You just want the bulgur to soak up the juices. Set aside.

Rinse the herbs and dry them thoroughly, using a salad spinner or clean kitchen towel, but try to keep them in a bunch for easier chopping. Trim and discard the lower parsley stems and very finely chop the rest. It's easiest if you begin chopping from where the stems start, holding the bunch tightly together with your fingers, then cross-chop with as few cuts as possible until fine.

Pick and thinly slice the mint leaves by stacking and rolling them into a cigar shape first. This might seem tedious, but cross-chopping mint will bruise it, making the leaves turn brown and the aroma bitter.

Finally, cut the scallions in half lengthwise and finely chop. Put the chopped ingredients into a large serving bowl, and add the bulgur and tomatoes, olive oil, salt, and black pepper. Toss with your hands to mix evenly, allow to sit for 5 minutes more to let the bulgur absorb the flavors, then serve.

Note:
Bulgur is made from cracked, parboiled, whole wheat grains and is usually sold in four grades: fine, medium, coarse, and very coarse. The brown variety, made from red wheat, has an even more intense aroma that is perfect for tabbouleh.

Tabbouleh

Salata Falahiyeh

Farmer's Salad

Levant

"*Falah*" translates to "farmer" in Arabic, referring to the origins of this salad, which was commonly made from ingredients of the day's harvest. This flavorful dish adds color, freshness, and crunch to the heartier dishes it is usually served alongside, such as Mujaddara. Who knew that raw onions could be so alluring?

ACTIVE TIME 20 minutes
TOTAL TIME 20 minutes
SERVES 4 as a side

- 2 tomatoes, about 9oz (250g) in total
- 3 small Persian cucumbers, about 9oz (250g) in total
- 1 small onion, about 3½oz (100g)
- 1 green chile (such as jalapeño)
- 1oz (30g) parsley
- 1oz (30g) mint, or 1 tbsp dried mint
- 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 3 tbsp lemon juice (from 1 lemon)
- ½ tsp salt

Finely cube the tomatoes and cucumbers. Peel and finely chop the onion. Seed and finely chop the chile. Trim off the lower stems from the parsley, then finely chop the rest. Pick the leaves from the mint and finely chop. Put everything into a bowl as you go.

Mix in the remaining ingredients and serve.

Note:
Fresh mint adds a wonderful aroma to the salad, but chopping it can bruise the leaves and make them slightly bitter as a result of oxidization. To prevent that happening, roll the leaves into a cigar shape and thinly slice, then turn by 90 degrees and repeat.

Salata Falahiyeh

Vada Pav

Spiced Potato Fritter Rolls

India

What started as an affordable snack for Mumbai's textile workers in the late 1960s has since taken the city by storm. Today, *vada pav* is considered the king of street food. To taste it amid honking rickshaws and chattering crowds is to experience the buzz of the city; yet when it comes to flavor, I dare to claim that the homemade version reigns supreme.

Vada pav is one of Mumbai's cheapest street foods, sold for a few rupees apiece, which means most vendors need to use the chutneys sparingly. But it's these chutneys that transform the stuffed soft roll (called *ladi pav*) into an orchestra of flavors, balancing sweet, tangy, and spicy. At home, you become the conductor, creating the balance that is right for you, and revealing the fascinating complexity of Indian food with every bite.

ACTIVE TIME 1 hour 10 minutes
TOTAL TIME 2 hours 20 minutes
SERVES 4

- 8 Pav or small soft rolls

Vada

- 3 potatoes, about (14oz) 400g in total
- 1¼ tbsp salt
- ¾oz (20g) fresh root ginger
- 2 large garlic cloves
- 2 green finger chiles, plus 8 to garnish (optional; see Note)
- 30 small fresh curry leaves
- ¾oz (20g) cilantro
- 4⅓ cups (1 liter) vegetable oil for deep-frying
- 1 tsp brown mustard seeds
- ⅓ tsp asafoetida
- ⅓ tsp ground turmeric
- 1 tbsp lemon juice (from ½ lemon)

Batter

- 4½oz (120g) chickpea flour (also called gram flour or besan)
- ⅓ tsp ground turmeric
- ¼ tsp asafoetida
- ⅓ tsp salt

To serve

- Hari Chutney

- Imli Chutney
- Lasun Chutney

Start with the *pav*, if making your own.

To make the *vada*, put the potatoes in a saucepan, cover with water, season with 1 tablespoon of the salt, bring to a boil, and simmer for 30–40 minutes or until knife tender. Drain and allow to cool slightly, then peel and mash. Make the chutneys in the meantime.

Peel the ginger and garlic, trim the chiles, then use a pestle and mortar to mash them to a paste. Pick the curry leaves; trim and discard the lower stems of the cilantro, and roughly chop the rest.

Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a small frying pan and add the mustard seeds. Once they sizzle, add the curry leaves, asafetida, and the ginger-garlic paste. Sauté until aromatic, then stir in the turmeric and turn off the heat. Mix in the mashed potatoes, lemon juice, cilantro, and remaining salt, then tip everything into a bowl and once cooled, mix well with your hands. Shape the mixture into eight patties about 1in (2.5cm) thick.

Heat the remaining vegetable oil in a large, heavy-based saucepan. If making the fried chiles, fry them first (see Note). Bring the oil temperature to 340°F (170°C). If you don't have a thermometer, place the end of a wooden spoon into the oil; if it's hot enough, tiny bubbles will form around the tip. In a bowl, whisk together the batter ingredients with ½ cup plus 1 tablespoon (140ml) of water. Coat four of the patties in the batter one at a time, and add immediately to the hot oil. Fry until golden (around 4 minutes), turning them occasionally, then transfer to paper towels to drain. Continue with the rest.

After frying the *vada*, slowly drizzle the rest of the batter into the hot oil. It will puff up into crispy bits (these are called *chura*). Once golden, use a slotted spoon to transfer them to paper towels to drain.

Cut open each *pav*, spread the *hari* (cilantro) chutney over the lower half, the *imli* (tamarind) chutney over the upper, and sprinkle the *lasun* (dry garlic) chutney over both. Add the *vada*, top with the *chura* and chiles, then close the sandwich and serve the chutneys alongside to dip into with each bite.

Note:
The chiles make a fiery garnish, but they will spit in the hot oil, so only use them if you're confident with deep-frying. Heat the oil to 285°F (140°C) and pierce each of the 8 chiles to prevent them from bursting. Place them on a slotted spoon and carefully dip it in and out of the hot oil, making sure to lift it up as soon as they sizzle. Continue this way until they stop sizzling in the oil and are blistered all over. Transfer to paper towels to drain.

Vada Pav

Sambar

Lentil & Vegetable Stew

India

When I stepped into the kitchen of a small roadside restaurant near the city of Bengaluru in Karnataka, I was engulfed by the intense heat of a fire, fueled by whole branches of burning wood. The restaurant owner threw handfuls of spices into a sizzling cauldron, while dressed in an elegant sari. "She is making *sambar*," her son whispered proudly. "It's our family's recipe." The heat became irrelevant. This was the birthplace of good food.

Until then, *sambar* had already accompanied me throughout my south India travels. Every 30 miles (50 kilometers) it would change entirely, from tangy to sweet, from spicy to mild, while reflecting the produce of the region or the time of the year. With so many variations, *sambar* becomes more of a way of eating than a recipe that's set in stone. Whether served as a lightly thickened broth, as it was prepared in the wood-fired kitchen, or bursting with vegetables, it becomes the perfect base to dip in freshly steamed Idli or crispy Dosa.

ACTIVE TIME 1 hour 10 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 20 minutes
SERVES 4 with Idli or Basmati Rice

Dal

- 5 3/4 oz (160g) toor dal (split pigeon peas)

Sambar

- 2oz (60g) seedless tamarind block or 2oz (60g) tamarind paste dissolved in 5 tbsp (75ml) water
- 8 round shallots
- 2 green finger chiles
- 1 tomato
- 1 carrot
- 1 potato
- 1 small eggplant
- 5 okra
- 3/4 oz (20g) cilantro
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1/4 tsp ground turmeric
- 3/4 tbsp salt

Sambar powder (or use a pre-made sambar powder)

- 10 dried Kashmiri chiles (or 1 tbsp Kashmiri chili powder)
- 1 tbsp coriander seeds
- 1/2 tsp cumin seeds
- 1/2 tsp fenugreek seeds
- 1/2 tsp black peppercorns

- 20–25 curry leaves
- 1 tbsp chana dal
- ½ tbsp urad dal
- 1 tsp ground turmeric
- ¼ tsp asafetida

Tempering

- 3 tbsp vegetable oil
- ½ tsp mustard seeds
- ¼ tsp fenugreek seeds
- 3 dried chiles
- handful of curry leaves (10–15)
- ⅛ tsp asafetida

Rinse the *toor* dal several times in fresh water until it runs almost clear, then put it in a pan with 3 cups (700ml) of water and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat and simmer, with a lid left ajar, for 45 minutes or until soft. Alternatively, cook with just 2 cups plus 2 tablespoons (500ml) of water for around 8 minutes in a pressure cooker. Use a potato masher to mash it into a thin porridge.

Meanwhile, for the *sambar*, put the tamarind in a heatproof bowl, pour over ⅔ cup (150ml) of boiling water and let it soak for 15 minutes. Use your hands to separate the flesh from the fibrous strings, then strain the juice into a bowl. (Skip this step if using tamarind paste.)

For the *sambar* powder, trim and seed the chiles, then toast them in a dry frying pan until they begin to char; set aside. Toast the seeds and black peppercorns until aromatic. Add the curry leaves and continue toasting until they look dry, then set aside as well. Finally, toast the *chana* and *urad* dal until golden. Once cooled, put everything in a spice grinder along with the turmeric and asafetida, and grind to a fine powder. You can store any leftovers in an airtight jar for several weeks.

Peel and halve the shallots for the *sambar*; trim the chiles and halve lengthwise; cube the tomato, carrot, potato, and eggplant; cut the okra into chunks; trim the lower stems of the cilantro, and finely chop the rest. Keep everything separate.

Heat the oil in a casserole and sauté the shallots over medium heat until golden. Add the tomato and chiles, and sauté for 1 minute more, then add the remaining vegetables, turmeric, salt, and 3 cups plus 2 tablespoons (750ml) of water. Bring to a boil, then simmer, covered, for 10 minutes until the vegetables are softening. Add 2 tablespoons of the *sambar* powder, the tamarind juice (or dissolved paste), and the mashed dal. Return to a boil, then turn off the heat.

For the tempering, heat the oil in a small pan, and add the mustard and fenugreek seeds. Once they sizzle, add the chiles, curry leaves, and as soon as the leaves are crispy, the asafetida.

Pour it over the *sambar*, followed by the chopped cilantro. Cover with a lid to let it infuse for 2 minutes, then give it a good stir, and serve.

Sambar

Yu Xiang Qiezi

"Fish-Fragrant" Eggplants

China

Sweet, savory, sour, and spicy—the fragrant flavor notes of Sichuan's *yu xiang* sauce are commonly used to season seafood, hence the name, which translates as "fish-fragrance." According to legend, *yu xiang qiezi* came into being when a cook wanted to prepare her husband's favorite dish but had run out of fish and used eggplants instead. It is one of Sichuan's most beloved eggplant dishes, and makes a delectable side or a main if served with rice, which will gear up your taste buds for the wonderful flavors of Sichuan cooking.

ACTIVE TIME 55 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 5 minutes
SERVES 4 with rice

- 3–4 Chinese eggplants, about 1lb 9oz (700g) in total (or use Persian or globe eggplants)
- 1 tbsp salt
- 2 cups plus 2 tbsp (500ml) vegetable oil
- 4 large garlic cloves
- 3/4oz (20g) fresh root ginger
- 1oz (30g) pickled Sichuan chiles, or 1/2 tsp more of chile bean paste (doubanjiang)
- 4 scallions
- 1 tsp light soy sauce
- 2 tbsp Chinese black vinegar (Chinkiang)
- 1 tbsp Shaoxing wine
- 6 1/2 tbsp (100ml) vegetable stock or water
- 2 tbsp golden caster sugar, or demerara or turbinado, refined in a food processor
- 1 tsp potato starch
- 1 heaped tsp Sichuan chile bean paste (doubanjiang)

Trim and quarter the eggplants lengthwise and cut into 2 1/2in (6cm) long pieces (for globe eggplants, cut the pieces lengthwise in half again). Transfer to a colander, season with the salt, and set aside for 30 minutes. After 10 minutes, continue with the rest of the recipe. To steam the eggplants instead of frying, see Note.

Heat the oil in a wok or wide saucepan to 355°F (180°C). (If you don't have a thermometer, place the end of a wooden spoon into the hot oil; tiny rapid bubbles should form around the wood when it's hot enough.) Meanwhile, peel and finely chop the garlic and ginger; roughly chop the pickled chiles; thinly slice the scallions and set aside some of the greener parts as a garnish. Mix together the soy sauce, black vinegar, Shaoxing wine, stock, and sugar. In a separate bowl, mix the potato starch with 2 tablespoons of water. Line a cooling rack with paper towel.

Rinse the eggplant pieces and pat them dry between paper towel. Fry them in around three batches in the hot oil until just golden (3–4 minutes per batch), keeping the wok over the highest flame to prevent the oil from cooling down. Flash-frying them this way will keep their color and firmness intact. Use a slotted spoon to transfer them to the lined rack to drain the excess oil.

Carefully pour the hot oil into a heatproof bowl placed on a heatproof surface, then return 3 tablespoons of the oil to the wok and heat over medium heat. Add the *doubanjiang* and stir until dissolved in the oil (be careful, it'll spit), then add the garlic, ginger, and pickled chiles, and cook until aromatic, temporarily moving the wok away from the flame if the heat is too high.

Add the sauce, and as soon as it comes to a boil, tip in the eggplants (first drain any residual juices, if you steamed them). Give the potato-starch mixture another stir to dissolve evenly, and add half of it as well.

Cook, stirring gently, until the sauce has thickened slightly and coats the eggplant pieces. If necessary, add the rest of the potato-starch mixture to thicken the sauce more. Finally, stir in the sliced scallions and turn off the heat. Divide among bowls, garnish with the reserved scallions, and serve.

Note:
Seasoning and draining the eggplants removes some of the water, as well as bitter flavor notes. If you prefer to steam them, you can skip this step to save time. For steaming without a steaming basket, place a small heatproof bowl in a wide pan for which you have a lid, and rest a heatproof plate on top. Pour in boiling water from the kettle to a depth of a few centimeters, without letting the water touch the plate, then return the water to a rapid boil. Arrange the eggplant pieces on the plate with the skin facing downwards. It's fine to stack them, but you want to place the pieces that were closest to the stem on top, since they are firmer and need to cook longer. Cover the pan with a lid and steam over medium-low heat for 15–20 minutes or until the eggplant pieces are knife tender.

Yu Xiang Qiezi

Gudeg Jogja

Jackfruit Stew

Indonesia

Jackfruit is integral to Indonesian cuisine. One reason for its popularity is that it's considered both a vegetable and a fruit. Picking unripe jackfruit is not a sign of impatience. When it's picked young, the white flesh is firm but subtle in flavor, making it a versatile ingredient in a range of savory dishes, including *gudeg jogja*.

It's a popular staple from the Javanese city of Yogyakarta, prepared in giant batches and stewed while covered with large teak leaves, which give it its distinctive red color. The leaves are difficult to source outside of Indonesia, but black tea bags, although not as vibrant in color, offer an easy alternative. The final dish is known for its blend of sweet and savory aromas, typical of Javanese cuisine—a balance that's enriched by serving it with a spicy *sambal* (see Sambal Balado).

ACTIVE TIME 35 minutes
TOTAL TIME 2 hours 45 minutes
SERVES 4 as a side

- 6 round shallots, around 3½oz (100g) in total
- 10 candlenuts, around 1–1¼oz (30–40g), or macadamia nuts
- 1 tbsp coriander seeds
- 1¼oz (40g) galangal
- 2 sticks of lemongrass
- 2 x 14oz (400g) cans of young jackfruit
- 4 Indonesian bay leaves (daun salam)
- 6 makrut lime leaves
- 1oz (30g) palm sugar
- 14fl oz (400ml) can of coconut milk
- 1 tbsp salt
- 2 fresh teak leaves (or 4 black tea bags)

To serve

- Sambal Balado or store-bought sambal

Peel the shallots and garlic, and put in the bowl of a small food processor. Toast the candlenuts in a dry frying pan over medium heat until they have golden spots all over, and set aside. Toast the coriander seeds in the same pan until aromatic, then use a pestle and mortar to grind the seeds to a fine powder. Transfer to the food processor along with the toasted nuts and blend everything to a paste, adding a few tablespoons of water if needed.

Peel the galangal using a vegetable peeler. Whack the galangal and lemongrass with a rolling pin to break open the fibers. Put both in a casserole.

Drain the jackfruit, and tip it into the casserole along with the spice paste, 1¾ cups (400ml) of water, and the remaining ingredients, using the teak leaves to cover the surface (if using tea bags, just add them to the stew). Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer, covered with a lid, for 1 hour. Remove the lid, discard the teak leaves (or tea bags) and lemongrass, and continue simmering until the jackfruit has absorbed all of the liquid (1–1½ hours), stirring often. Make the Sambal Balado in the meantime. Remove the galangal, bay leaves, and lime leaves, then serve with the *sambal*.

Pictured here

Note:
To turn this into a more wholesome meal (see Whole Meals), pair it with Tahu Tempe Bacem and freshly steamed rice.

Yachaejeon

Vegetable Pancakes

Korea

Stemming from a time when resourcefulness was paramount, *yachaejeon* (literally "vegetable fried pancake") was born from the necessity to make use of the harvests of seasonal vegetables, and relies on chopping, then binding them, with a simple batter. Nowadays, this much-loved recipe is ideal for using up leftover vegetables or to incorporate whatever you have plenty of throughout the year. It's traditionally eaten as an appetizer, but also makes a great, light lunch.

ACTIVE TIME 45 minutes
TOTAL TIME 45 minutes
SERVES 4 as an appetizer or 2 as a light lunch

Dipping sauce

- 1 tsp sesame seeds
- 2 tbsp soy sauce
- 1 tbsp rice vinegar
- 1 tsp gochugaru (Korean dried pepper powder)

Veg

- ½ large zucchini, around 5½oz (150g)
- ½ large carrot, around 1¾oz (50g)
- ½ potato
- 1 chestnut mushroom
- ½ onion
- 1 green chile
- 5 scallions
- 3 tbsp vegetable oil

Batter

- 4½oz (130g) all-purpose flour
- ¾ cup (180ml) water
- 1 tsp salt

First make the dipping sauce. In a large nonstick frying pan, toast the sesame seeds until golden, then set aside (you'll use the pan later to fry the pancakes). In the meantime, combine the soy sauce, rice vinegar, and *gochugaru* in a small bowl. Once cooled down slightly, stir in the sesame seeds.

Halve the zucchini and carrot widthwise and julienne (slice finely into matchsticks), along with the potato and mushroom. You can also use the coarse side of a box grater instead of julienning. Peel and thinly slice the onion; thinly slice the chile; cut the scallion into 1¼–2in (3–5cm) pieces. Transfer everything to a bowl and toss to mix.

Preheat 1 tablespoon of the oil in the frying pan you used earlier, over medium heat. To make the batter, combine the flour, water, and salt in a large mixing bowl and whisk well. Mix the vegetables through the batter until everything is evenly coated.

Ladle half of the vegetable and batter mixture into the hot pan. Use a spatula to flatten the vegetables to form a thin, even pancake. As it cooks, it'll be easier to spread out, so keep going. Fry the pancake for 5–7 minutes, or until golden, then flip it. Drizzle some extra oil around the sides, flatten the pancake even more with the spatula, and fry for another 5–7 minutes, until golden and crispy around the edges. Transfer to a baking sheet, keep warm in a low oven, or by covering it with a clean kitchen towel, and repeat with the remaining mixture. Cut both pancakes into squares and serve with the dipping sauce.

Note:
Although not traditional, I sometimes like to add a tablespoon of gochujang *(Korean chili paste) to my batter to give it an extra kick of umami and a fiery red color. Just use* ½ *teaspoon less salt.*

Yachaejeon

◀ CONTENTS

Dips & Condiments

It's a tale as old as time. You sit down at the table, scan the menu to order your mains, and when you look up again, a basket of bread and a bowl of something utterly delicious has appeared out of nowhere. "Might as well," you think, and although it's meant to accompany your meal, both bread and dip are devoured before the mains arrive. It's like trying to make the popcorn last the entire movie. Impossible.

Whether you scoop a crusty loaf through smoky Melitzanosalata (a Greek eggplant dip;) or drag warm flatbreads through peanutty Shatat Dakwa, dips are not only fun to eat, they're also a social event. The universal joy of breaking bread together, passing it around the table and dipping it, is often the icebreaker to a good meal. If the dips last long enough, they can even give rhythm to the occasion. Serve garlicky Toum during a barbecue and the table will always be busy, without pestering the person in charge of the grill.

Pairing dips on their own with a fitting form of bread is one of the best inventions of our food history. But dips also have the power to elevate. Combining Tahini Sauce with crispy Falafel, or smothering spicy Sambal Balado on every bite of the Indonesian jackfruit stew Gudeg Jogja, gives these dishes their finishing brushstrokes. And this is where dips blend with another exciting category: condiments. In particular, chutneys.

Good food works in layers. The balance of the five basic tastes—sweet, salty, sour, bitter, and umami—is innate to our pursuit of flavor, but we also crave different textures, and even colors, with every bite. In India, the birthplace of chutney, cooks ingeniously accomplish this mission on breakfast tables, at roadside food stalls, and on the dinner plates of established restaurants alike.

In Western food culture, chutneys are invariably considered somewhat of a hybrid between jam and relish—a sweet yet sometimes tangy concoction that is rarely used in dishes but often makes an appearance on cheeseboards. Yet Indian chutneys are far more profound. They are made from a huge range of ingredients including herbs, vegetables, aromatics, fruits, nuts, and even legumes that balance and accentuate whatever they touch. Even their textures differ widely, from smooth to chunky, from liquid to dry.

Sometimes, a single chutney is enough to elevate an entire dining experience, like the cooling sensation of a Thengai Chutney served with the fluffy rice and lentil cakes Idli and the fragrant vegetable curry Sambar. At other times, several chutneys are combined into building blocks that bring all the layers together. Not many would consider the combination of desiccated coconut, garlic, chile, and peanuts a "chutney," yet Lasun Chutney is one of the essential elements that make Vada Pav, Mumbai's potato fritters packed into a soft bread roll, so memorable. Serve it with Imli Chutney and Hari Chutney on the table, and watch each guest create their perfect balance of textures, flavors, and colors.

Melitzanosalata: *Smoky Eggplant Dip*
Skordalia: *Bread & Walnut Garlic Dip*
Zaalouk: *Smoky Eggplant & Tomato Dip*
Toum: *Garlic Sauce*
Tahini: *Sesame Seed Paste*
Tahini Sauce
Hummus *Chickpea & Tahini Dip*
Hari Chutney: *Cilantro Chutney*
Lasun Chutney: *Dry Garlic Chutney*
Thengai Chutney: *Coconut Chutney*
Imli Chutney: *Tamarind Chutney*
Imli Khajoor Chutney: *Tamarind Date Chutney*
Shatat Dakwa: *Peanut Chili Dip*
Milagai Podi: *Gunpowder Mix*
Sambal Balado: *Red Chili Paste*

Melitzanosalata

Smoky Eggplant Dip

Greece

Many tavernas in Greece dedicate an entire part of their menu to *alifes* or "spreads." It's one of the biggest joys of eating out: filling the table with a range of creamy-textured dishes and finishing the bread basket long before the mains arrive. *Melitzanosalata* is one of these traditional spreads, and Greece's bold answer to *baba ghanoush*. With little else to distract, it's one of the purest ways to experience the magic of smoky eggplants, especially if served fridge-cold with some crusty bread on a warm summer's day.

ACTIVE TIME 45 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 5 minutes, plus refrigerating
SERVES 4

- 2 large eggplants, about 1¾lb (800g)
- ¾oz (20g) parsley
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 large garlic clove
- 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil plus extra to finish
- ¾ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- a few Kalamata olives (optional)

To grill the eggplants in the oven, see Note. For a far smokier flavor, grill them directly on the gas burner (or on a barbecue, of course). This method can be a little messy, so I usually remove the burner rings, cover the burner with foil (tearing holes to leave the burner exposed), and return the rings before starting. Use a fork to pierce holes all over the eggplants, then place them on separate burners directly over a medium flame for 20 minutes, turning them every 5 minutes, until the skins are charred like burned paper. Transfer the hot eggplants to an airtight container, or a bowl covered with a plate, and let them steam for 15 minutes.

Move the eggplants to a board, and once cool enough to handle, peel off the charred skin with your fingers, and discard (it's fine if some small bits stay on). Place a sieve over a clean bowl, then roughly chop the flesh of the eggplants, transfer to the sieve, and let it drain for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, trim and discard the lower stems of the parsley, and finely chop the rest. Squeeze the lemon juice.

Discard the liquid drained from the eggplants and place the eggplant flesh in the bowl. Peel and grate in the garlic, then add the lemon juice, olive oil, salt, and pepper. Mix and mash with a fork until you have a coarse dip. Stir in most of the parsley, then cover and refrigerate the *melitzanosalata* (and remaining parsley) for at least 30 minutes. To serve, spread the dip out in a shallow serving bowl, drizzle with extra olive oil, sprinkle with the remaining parsley, and place a few olives, if using, in the center of the dish.

Note:
To grill the eggplants in the oven, preheat the grill to high and line a baking tray with foil. Halve the eggplants lengthwise and place them cut-side down on the tray. Grill on the top shelf for 40–45 minutes or until the skin is charred like burned paper. Transfer the eggplants to a board, scoop out the flesh with a spoon, discard the skins, and use the flesh as described above.

Melitzanosalata

Skordalia

Bread & Walnut Garlic Dip

Greece

In many parts of Greece, *skordalia* is known as a garlic and potato dip, but the combination of bread and walnuts, common in the north of the country, gives the condiment richness and body. This historic version dates back to Ancient Greece, to a time when potatoes were not yet part of the daily diet, and sour grape juice was used instead of lemons. Back then, garlic was already hailed for its health benefits, and used liberally to give a boost to manual laborers as well as Olympian athletes. That's why *skordalia* is not a bread dip flavored with garlic, but a garlic dip thickened with bread. Nowadays, it's often eaten alongside grilled vegetables, and also works well served with bread.

ACTIVE TIME 20 minutes
TOTAL TIME 20 minutes
SERVES 4–8

- 9¼oz (260g) stale bread from around 10oz (290g) fresh bread
- 1oz (30g) garlic cloves (5–6 cloves)
- 3½oz (100g) walnuts
- 1 tsp salt
- 1½ tbsp red wine vinegar
- ½ cup (120ml) extra virgin olive oil, plus extra to serve

Remove the crusts from the bread until you have 5oz (140g) crustless bread (you can blitz the crusts into breadcrumbs, air-dry them completely, and store at room temperature or in the freezer for other recipes). Cut the bread into chunks, dunk them in a bowl of water for a few seconds to soften slightly, then squeeze out as much water as possible and set aside.

Peel the garlic cloves and put them in a food processor, along with the walnuts and salt. Blend them finely, then add the vinegar, 2 tablespoons of water, and 2 tablespoons of the olive oil, and blend for 1–2 minutes, scraping down the sides of the processor occasionally, until it has turned into a coarse paste.

Now add the bread, remaining olive oil, and 4 tablespoons of water, and blend everything into a thick but easily spreadable dip, adding more water if needed. Transfer to a bowl, then refrigerate for at least 1 hour to let the flavors balance out and the dip thicken a little. Drizzle with extra olive oil before serving.

Skordalia

Zaalouk

Smoky Eggplant & Tomato Dip

Morocco

Meet *baba ghanoush*'s lesser-known Moroccan cousin. It's often referred to as a salad, but don't be fooled. *Zaalouk* is the eggplant dip you've been craving all along. Though tomatoes only arrived in North Africa in the late 19th century, they have become inseparable from the region's rich cuisine. When combined with the gentle heat of the spices, the smoky eggplants, and the slight tang from the lemon, they make a delectable dip that will transport you to North Africa's bustling souks. Make sure you have a hefty chunk of warm crusty bread nearby, because *zaalouk* begs to be mopped up.

ACTIVE TIME 50 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 5 minutes
SERVES 4 as a side or 2 as a main if served with bread

- 2 large eggplants, about 1¾lb (800g) in total
- ¾oz (20g) parsley
- ¾oz (20g) cilantro
- 4 large tomatoes, about 1lb 5oz (600g) in total
- 5 tbsp (75ml) extra virgin olive oil, plus extra to serve
- 5 large garlic cloves
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 2 tsp paprika
- ⅛ tsp chili powder
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tbsp lemon juice

Bring a pan of water to a boil to cook the tomatoes.

To grill the eggplants in the oven, see Notes. For a far smokier flavor, grill them directly on a gas burner (or barbecue, of course). This method can be a little messy, so I usually remove the burner rings, cover the burner with foil (tearing holes to leave the burner exposed), and return the rings before starting. Use a fork to pierce holes all over the eggplants, then place them on separate burners directly over a medium flame for 20 minutes, turning them every 5 minutes, until the skins are charred like burned paper.

Transfer the hot eggplants to an airtight container, or a bowl covered with a plate, and let them steam for 15 minutes. Move the eggplants to a board, and once cold enough to handle, peel off the charred skin with your fingers, and discard (it's fine if some small bits stay on). Roughly chop the flesh.

Meanwhile, trim and discard the lower stems of the parsley and cilantro, finely chop the rest, and set aside. Then prepare the tomatoes: fill a bowl with ice (or very cold water). Remove the stem and score an "X" onto the bottom of each tomato. Blanch for 30–60 seconds, then use a slotted spoon to transfer to

the cold water. When cool enough to handle, use a paring knife to peel and core the tomatoes. Cut them in half horizontally, scoop out and discard the seeds, then cube the flesh.

Heat the oil in a casserole over medium-low heat. Peel and finely grate or crush the garlic, and sauté until aromatic. Stir in the tomatoes and tomato paste, then add the parsley, cilantro, cumin, paprika, chili powder, and salt.

Reduce the heat and simmer, covered, for 15 minutes, stirring halfway through, until the tomatoes have softened. Stir in the eggplants and cook, uncovered, until most of the liquid has evaporated (5–10 minutes), then use a potato masher to mash to a chunky spread.

Stir in the lemon juice and turn off the heat. Transfer to a bowl, drizzle with extra olive oil, and serve warm or cold with bread of your choice.

Note:
To grill the eggplants in the oven, preheat the grill to high and line a baking sheet with foil. Halve the eggplants lengthwise and place cut-side down on the sheet. Grill on the top shelf for 40–45 minutes or until the skin is charred like burned paper. Transfer the eggplants to a board, scoop out the flesh with a spoon, discard the skins, then roughly chop the flesh and use as described above.

Zaalouk

Toum

Garlic Sauce

Lebanon

Capture the essence of garlic in a dip and you've got *toum* (the word translates as "garlic" in Arabic). The first bite of freshly made *toum* is wonderfully fierce, and will test the mettle of the most avid garlic fanatic. If it's too much, let it rest for a day in the fridge, after which the sharpness subsides, resulting in a balanced dip that elevates anything it comes into contact with.

The traditional way to make *toum*, which is popular across the Levant, is labor-intensive, achieved by grinding garlic to a paste in a pestle and mortar, then slowly working in the oil and lemon juice until it emulsifies, and takes on a thick, fluffy texture. A food processor is used in modern kitchens, but I swear by an immersion blender, which will emulsify the *toum* in less than 30 seconds!

ACTIVE TIME 15 minutes (immersion blender); 35 minutes (food processor)
TOTAL TIME 15–40 minutes, depending on method
SERVES 8–12

- 1 large garlic bulb, about 2–2¼oz (60–70g) of garlic cloves
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 cup minus 4 tsp (220ml) vegetable oil
- liquid from 14oz (400g) can of chickpeas (optional, to fix a broken toum; see Note)

Immersion blender method

Peel the garlic cloves, cut them in half, remove the germ (the greenish part running through the center) from each, and halve again.

Put the garlic, salt, lemon juice, 2 tablespoons of ice cold water, and the oil in the jug of an immersion blender. Place the blender on the bottom of the jug and switch it on, keeping it firmly in place. This way, it will suck in small amounts of oil, which will emulsify with the garlic.

Once a portion of the mixture has thickened, carefully start lifting the blender to work in the rest. In the end, it should have the consistency of a fluffy mayonnaise. Adjust the texture by adding more oil (to make it thicker) or more ice water (to make it thinner). Transfer the *toum* to an airtight container and refrigerate until needed. It will keep covered in the fridge for up to 4 weeks.

- 2 large garlic bulbs, about 4–4½oz (120–140g) of cloves
- 2 tsp salt
- 4 tbsp lemon juice
- 2 cups minus 2 tbsp (440ml) vegetable oil
- liquid from 2 x 14oz (400g) can of chickpeas (optional, to fix a broken toum; see Note)

Food processor method

This method uses double the amount of ingredients used in the immersion blender method to allow the food processor blades to catch.

Peel the garlic, halve the cloves, and remove the germ from each.

Put the garlic and salt in the bowl of a food processor and blend to a paste, scraping down the sides every now and then. Add 2 tablespoons of the lemon juice and continue blending until almost smooth.

With the processor running on low speed, slowly drizzle in 2 tablespoons of the oil until it begins to emulsify with the garlic. Continue slowly pouring in more oil until you've used the first 6½ tablespoons (100ml), then add 1 tablespoon of lemon juice. Continue alternating between oil and lemon juice, until all the lemon juice has been added. Then alternate between adding oil and a total of 4 tablespoons of ice cold water, until you've used up all of the liquids, and the *toum* is light and fluffy. It will take 15–20 minutes. Don't rush, or your emulsion might break (see Note).

Transfer to an airtight container and refrigerate until needed. It will keep, covered in the fridge, for up to 4 weeks.

Note:
Getting the emulsion to work can be tricky. If your toum "breaks" into a liquid slurry rather than a fluffy dip, just pour everything into a tall jug and add 4–6 tablespoons of the liquid from the can of chickpeas, or double the amount (you'll need 2 cans) if you followed the food processor quantities. Use an immersion blender to blend it all together. It should emulsify into a smooth sauce in seconds.

Toum

Tahini

Sesame Seed Paste

Levant

Common across the Middle East and parts of the Mediterranean, tahini is a powerful condiment made from a single ingredient. After washing, hulling, and roasting sesame seeds, they are stone-ground to a velvety-smooth paste. At home, our blenders can't compete with the sheer force of a basalt grindstone, but adding a little bit of sesame oil will help speed things up and prevent the gadget from overheating.

The word "tahini" is actually the Greek spelling of "*tahina*," which comes from the Arabic "*tahn*" meaning "ground." It's the magical ingredient to many dishes in this book. Try Falafel Pita, Rummaniyeh and Kabak Talısı to get a taste for its transformative power across cultures.

ACTIVE TIME 15 minutes
TOTAL TIME 25 minutes
MAKES $9\frac{3}{4}$oz (275g)

- 10oz (300g) sesame seeds
- 1–2 tbsp (toasted) sesame oil (if needed)

Toast the sesame seeds in a large, dry frying pan over medium heat in two batches until glossy and slightly golden (3–5 minutes per batch). Tahini is light in color, so there's no need to toast the seeds to a dark shade.

Transfer to a wide bowl, cool for 10 minutes, then blend in a high-speed blender until smooth and runny (3–5 minutes), scraping down the sides every now and then, and adding 1 tablespoon of sesame oil at a time if needed. If the blender becomes quite hot, let it cool slightly before continuing. Transfer to a jar and store at room temperature, where it'll keep well for a few weeks before it begins to dry out.

Tahini Sauce

Levant

For many Levantine dishes, tahini is not used in its raw form, but first transformed into a tangy, garlicky sauce that is entirely smooth (achieved by straining the garlic-infused lemon juice). It makes a brilliant dip for Falafel and is one of the key components for an authentically stuffed Pita.

ACTIVE TIME 15 minutes
TOTAL TIME 20 minutes
SERVES 4–8

- 4 large garlic cloves
- 3½ tbsp lemon juice
- 3½oz (100g) Tahini
- ½ tsp salt

Peel and finely grate the garlic cloves into a small bowl, stir in the lemon juice, and let it sit for 10 minutes, which will mellow the sharpness of the garlic. Strain the liquid through a fine sieve into a mixing bowl and press through as much of the juice as you can. Add the tahini and salt to the bowl, and whisk until it seizes to a firm paste. Whisk in cold water, 1–2 tablespoons at a time, until the mixture is light in color and runny enough to drizzle from a spoon.

Tahini Sauce

Hummus

Chickpea & Tahini Dip

Levant

Hummus, literally "chickpea" in Arabic, is believed to date back to Ancient Egypt, with the first documented recipe mentioning a mixture of chickpeas, vinegar, lemon and herbs. Since then the dish has travelled through the Levant and into North Africa, Greece, and Türkiye, acquiring regional nuances on the way. To achieve the satisfying creaminess for which hummus is famed, the chickpeas are typically simmered for several hours and mixed with copious amounts of tahini. To speed things up, most recipes use bicarbonate of soda. This technique will give you buttery soft chickpeas for velvety hummus that begs to be scooped up with freshly baked Pita.

ACTIVE TIME 25 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour, plus soaking overnight
SERVES 8

- 4oz (110g) dried chickpeas
- 1 tbsp salt plus 3/4 tsp
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 2 garlic cloves
- 4 tbsp plus 2 tsp (70ml) lemon juice
- 5 3/4 oz (160g) Tahini (see Tahini, to make your own)

Toppings

- 1 large garlic clove
- 2 green chiles, such as jalapeño (optional)
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- a few sprigs of parsley
- extra virgin olive oil to drizzle
- pinch of paprika

Soak the chickpeas overnight with 1 tablespoon of the salt, in around 4 1/3 cups (1 liter) of water. The next day, drain and rinse the chickpeas, and put them in a saucepan with the baking soda and 4 1/3 cups (1 liter) of water. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat, skim off any foam, and simmer without a lid for 30 minutes or until the chickpeas are just tender. Set aside 3 tablespoons of them in a bowl, along with around 6 1/2 tablespoons (100ml) of the cooking liquid and 1/4 teaspoon of salt. We'll use these as a garnish later. Continue cooking the remaining chickpeas for 25 minutes more, or until they are completely soft and most of them have fallen apart. Drain well, but keep the cooking liquid.

Meanwhile, prepare the toppings: peel the garlic clove and trim the chiles. Cut both into chunks and transfer to a small food processor along with the lemon juice and a pinch of salt. Blend until finely chopped, scraping down the sides once or twice, then transfer to a small bowl and refrigerate until

needed. If not using the chiles, you can also just grate or crush the garlic into the lemon juice. Trim and discard the lower stems of the parsley, roughly chop the rest, and refrigerate until needed.

For the hummus, peel and finely grate or crush the garlic into a small bowl, stir in the lemon juice, and let it infuse for at least 10 minutes. While the chickpeas are still hot, tip them into a food processor. Strain the garlic-infused lemon juice into the food processor as well, squeezing out the juices with a spoon, and discarding the leftover garlic (you can also add it, but it won't blend smoothly). Then add the tahini and ½ teaspoon of salt, and blend for 1–2 minutes until completely smooth. It should be creamy but thick enough that it holds a peak when stirred, so adjust the texture by either adding some of the cooking liquid (to soften it) or extra tahini (to thicken it).

To serve, spread the hummus out on a plate, making a large well in the middle. Drain the reserved chickpeas and add them to the well, then drizzle with a generous amount of olive oil followed by the lemon, chile, and garlic mixture. Sprinkle the parsley over the chickpeas and add a pinch of paprika all over.

Hummus

Hari Chutney

Cilantro Chutney

India

You'll find this chutney as a companion to many Indian dishes, often with slight changes to the basic recipe to enhance nuances of whatever it is paired with. Traditionally, this version is served with Vada Pav alongside Imli Chutney and Lasun Chutney. The cilantro and aromatic seasonings add a pleasant freshness and a vibrant color.

ACTIVE TIME 10 minutes
TOTAL TIME 10 minutes
SERVES 4

- 3½oz (100g) cilantro
- 1 green finger chile
- 1 garlic clove
- ½ tsp ground cumin
- 1½ tbsp lemon juice
- 4 tbsp cold water
- ½ tsp salt

Trim the lower stems of the cilantro and roughly chop the rest. Trim the chile and peel the garlic. Put all the ingredients into the jug of a blender and blend to a thick chutney. You might need to give the jug a shake while blending until it comes together, or add more water if necessary.

Notes:

⚫ *Refrigerate leftovers, covered, for 2–3 days.*
⚫ *The acidity of the lemon juice will discolor the chutney after a few hours, so to make it ahead, add a bit more water instead of the lemon juice to allow it to blend, then add the juice just before serving.*

Lasun Chutney

Dry Garlic Chutney

India

Along with the tangy Imli Chutney and fresh Hari Chutney, this Maharashtrian chutney is one of the secret components that turn Vada Pav into a symphony of flavors. While the "dry" texture might come as a surprise, this chutney brings that extra layer of goodness that makes you want to sprinkle on a bit more with every bite, adding the aroma of garlic, toasted nuts, and fiery chiles.

ACTIVE TIME 15 minutes
TOTAL TIME 20 minutes
SERVES 4–6

- 6 large garlic cloves
- 1 tbsp raw blanched peanuts
- 3 tbsp desiccated coconut
- 1 heaped tsp Kashmiri chili powder
- ½ tsp s alt

Peel the garlic cloves and toast them together with the peanuts in a small, dry frying pan, until they have golden spots all over. Stir in the desiccated coconut and continue toasting, until it's golden as well.

Tip everything into a small food processor, along with the chili powder and salt, and process until the mixture has a fine texture and an evenly red color.

Notes:

⚫ *Refrigerate leftovers for 2–3 weeks.*
⚫ *Kashmiri chili powder has a vibrant red color and milder heat. If you're planning to substitute, the color will be less intense and the heat even more fiery.*

Thengai Chutney

Coconut Chutney

India

In the West, Indian cuisine is often associated with the use of coconuts—yet coconut palms are mostly limited to the sun-drenched coasts of southern India, where their rich fruits have long been used to create cooling chutneys like this one. This condiment combines the nutty flavor of toasted *urad* dal (hulled black gram) with the fragrance of crispy, fried curry leaves and the freshness of raw coconut. It's the ideal chutney to soothe and balance the fragrance of Sambar, while scooping it up with a fluffy Idli.

ACTIVE TIME 35 minutes
TOTAL TIME 35 minutes
SERVES 4

- 1 tbsp chana dal
- 1 raw coconut, or 1½oz (40g) desiccated coconut
- 1 green finger chile
- ¾oz (20g) fresh root ginger
- ½ tsp cumin seeds
- ½ tsp salt

Tempering

- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- ½ tsp brown mustard seeds
- 1 tsp urad dal
- 2 dried red chiles
- 8–10 curry leaves
- ⅛ tsp asafetida

Toast the *chana* dal in a dry frying pan until golden (3–5 minutes) and set aside. Hold the coconut over a bowl and use the back of a sturdy knife (you could use a rolling pin, but it might leave dents) to knock firmly on the center of the shell, going around the "equator" until it cracks open.

Drain the water (you can drink it), then use a round-ended butter knife to pierce between the flesh and shell. Wiggle the knife around the flesh to loosen (it might take a few turns before the flesh pops free), then peel away and discard the brown skin. Finely grate the coconut flesh until you have 4½oz (125g).

Trim the chile and peel the ginger, then put both in the jug of a blender along with the toasted *chana* dal, cumin seeds, salt, grated coconut (or desiccated coconut if using), and ⅔ cup (150ml) water. Blend to a thick chutney.

For the tempering, heat the oil in a small frying pan and fry the mustard seeds until sizzling (they might pop). Add the *urad* dal, and once it's golden, carefully tip in the chiles, curry leaves, and asafetida, then turn off the heat. Continue frying the leaves, stirring until crispy, then pour the tempering over the chutney. Stir it through and serve.

Pictured here

Note:
Refrigerate leftover chutney for 2–3 days, covered. It'll firm up, but you can loosen it by gently heating it in a pan.

Imli Chutney

Tamarind Chutney

India

Far more than just a condiment, imli chutney is an exercise in mastering the skill of balancing flavors. It unites the zesty tanginess of the freshly extracted tamarind with the complex sweetness of unrefined cane sugar (jaggery), a marriage of sour and sweet that instantly satisfies two of our five basic tastes. Add to that the savory notes from the spices and you've got a flavorful powerhouse.

It's often served alongside Hari Chutney and Lasun Chutney to enhance Vada Pav. It's the perfect example of how a range of chutneys can elevate a dish to new heights.

ACTIVE TIME 30 minutes
TOTAL TIME 45 minutes
SERVES 4

- 3½oz (100g) block of seedless tamarind, or 3½oz (100g) tamarind paste dissolved in 6½ tbsp (100ml) water
- 2½oz (75g) jaggery or light brown sugar
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- ¼ tsp Kashmiri chili powder, or ⅛ tsp chili powder
- ½ tsp salt

Break the tamarind into pieces into a bowl, cover with scant 1 cup (200ml) of boiling water, leave to soak for 15 minutes, then mash it between your fingers to loosen the fibers.

Strain the juice through a sieve directly into a saucepan, using a spoon to press through as much of the juices as possible and making sure to scrape the bottom of the sieve. Return the pulp to the bowl and rinse it with another 6½ tablespoons (100ml) of water. Strain once more, then discard the pulp. If using dissolved tamarind paste, just add it directly to the pan.

Grate or chop the jaggery into smaller pieces and put in a pan with the remaining ingredients. Bring to a boil, turn down the heat and simmer for 15 minutes, stirring often, until the chutney has thickened enough to coat the back of a spoon. Transfer to a bowl and set aside until needed.

Pictured here

Note:
Thanks to the acidity of the tamarind and the sweetness of the jaggery, you can store the chutney, covered in the fridge, for up to 4 months.

Imli Khajoor Chutney

Tamarind Date Chutney

India

This popular and slightly sweeter variation of Imli Chutney is traditionally used to flavor Indian *chaats*—savory snacks that are often enjoyed as a quick street-food bite. Its true potential really shines with the most explosive of all *chaats*, Pani Puri, where it beautifully balances the bursting flavors of the spicy and tangy herb water.

ACTIVE TIME 25 minutes
TOTAL TIME 45 minutes
SERVES 4

- 1¼oz (40g) block of seedless tamarind, or 1¼oz (40g) tamarind paste
- 1¾oz (50g) pitted dates
- 2oz (60g) jaggery (or light brown sugar)
- ½ tsp ground cumin
- ½ tsp ground ginger
- ¼ tsp ground coriander
- ¼ tsp Kashmiri chili powder, or ⅛ tsp chili powder
- ¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- ½ tsp black salt or sea salt

Tear the tamarind into smaller pieces (if using tamarind paste, only proceed with the dates for now) and put it in a saucepan, adding the dates and 1¼ cups (300ml) of water. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat and simmer, covered, for 10 minutes until the dates are soft. Transfer to a bowl and cool for 15 minutes.

Transfer the mixture to a blender, blend to a paste, and strain through a sieve back into the saucepan, scraping the liquid through with a spoon, and discarding any leftover pulp. Grate or chop the jaggery into smaller pieces and add it to the pan with the remaining ingredients, and 6½ tablespoons (100ml) more water (along with the tamarind paste, if using).

Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 10 minutes, stirring often, until the chutney has thickened but can still be drizzled. If using the chutney for Pani Puri, transfer it now to a bowl. To serve it as a thicker chutney alongside other dishes, simply cook it for 5–10 minutes more. Let it cool completely before serving.

Pictured here

Shatat Dakwa

Peanut Chile Dip

Sudan

"*Dakwa*" is the Sudanese Arabic dialect for "peanut paste." This popular ingredient is closer to a dense peanut flour than a smooth butter. It's tricky to achieve such a uniform texture at home, so opting for a smooth peanut butter is a common shortcut.

Usually, the dip starts with a shocking amount of fiery-hot bullet chiles, giving it a spicy kick that might blow your socks off. Adjust it to your own heat tolerance by choosing and mixing chiles from up or down the Scoville scale. With its spicy, tangy, and nutty flavors, it's the kind of dip you'll eat by the spoonful, but pair it with some warm flatbread and you might just discover your new favorite appetizer.

ACTIVE TIME 20 minutes
TOTAL TIME 30 minutes
SERVES 4–6

- 3½oz (100g) mixed red and green chiles of your choice
- 1 small onion, about 2¾oz (80g)
- 5 large garlic cloves
- 3 tbsp lime juice (from 1–2 limes)
- 3 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- ½ tsp salt
- 3 tbsp smooth peanut butter
- 1 tsp toasted sesame oil, to serve

Trim and roughly chop the chiles, peel and quarter the onion, peel the garlic, and squeeze the lime juice, putting everything in a small food processor as you go. Blend to a coarse paste.

Heat the oil over medium-low heat in a small saucepan for which you have a lid. Stir in the tomato paste and let it sizzle for a few seconds. Add the blended paste along with the black pepper and salt, and cook in the hot oil for around 1 minute until aromatic. Pour in 6½ tablespoons (100ml) of water, let it come to a simmer, then reduce the heat and cook, covered, for 10 minutes until the oil begins to show on the surface.

Stir in the peanut butter and cook, uncovered, for 2–3 minutes more, stirring often, until thickened into a rich spread. Transfer to a serving bowl, and drizzle over the sesame oil.

Shatat Dakwa

Milagai Podi

Gunpowder Mix

India

A powdered condiment so explosive in flavor, it's called gunpowder. Literally translating to "chili powder" in Tamil, it is made with ground chiles, split chickpeas (*chana* dal), hulled black gram (*urad* dal) and sesame seeds, giving it a pleasant crunch and nutty flavor.

Sprinkle it on Uttapam or, for an insider tip, mix some with a little toasted sesame oil to form a paste, then dunk your Idli into it to evenly coat both sides. Heaven!

ACTIVE TIME 25 minutes
TOTAL TIME 35 minutes

MAKES about 3 3/4 oz (110g)

- 3 tbsp chana dal
- 3 tbsp urad dal
- 2 tbsp sesame seeds
- 8 dried Kashmiri chiles, or 1 tbsp Kashmiri chili powder
- 1 tsp vegetable oil
- 20–25 curry leaves (optional)
- 1/4 tsp asafetida
- 3/4 tsp salt

Heat a dry frying pan over medium-low heat and toast the *chana* dal until it begins to turn golden (5–6 minutes). Add the *urad* dal and sesame seeds, and continue toasting until all three ingredients look golden (4–5 minutes). Transfer to a shallow bowl to cool.

Trim and seed the chiles. Heat the oil in the same pan on low heat and fry the chiles until aromatic (1–2 minutes). Add the curry leaves, turn off the heat, and continue frying in the residual heat until the leaves are crisp (1–2 minutes). Stir in the asafetida, then transfer to a separate bowl.

Allow everything to cool for at least 10 minutes, then use a spice grinder to grind the dal, sesame seeds, and salt until fairly fine, but retaining some crunch. You might need to do this in two batches for a more consistent texture. Be careful not to over-grind it or the sesame seeds will release their oil.

Transfer to a bowl, then grind the chiles, curry leaves, and asafetida until fine. Mix both powders together by pulsing them in the grinder or shaking them in a jar. It will keep well for several weeks, stored in an airtight container at room temperature.

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Sambal Balado

Red Chili Paste

Indonesia

There are well over a hundred varieties of Indonesian *sambal*. From cooked to raw, from smooth to coarse, they are a reflection of the vast culinary and cultural differences across the country. Fruits, aromatic herbs, or even fermented foods all become tools to elevate the fiery power of chiles, depending on seasonality, regional variation, or even the mood of the chef.

Sambal balado is a simple expression of this popular condiment. It's easy to make, yet still ticks all the spicy, sweet, and sour flavor notes that make *sambal*s so incredibly moreish. Although *sambal balado* is traditionally used as a paste for cooking, it's become my trusted accompaniment for Indonesian favorites such as Gudeg Jogja and Tahu Tempe Bacem. All it takes is that first bite to realize why *sambal* is not an optional condiment, but an integral part of Indonesian cuisine.

ACTIVE TIME 35 minutes
TOTAL TIME 35 minutes
MAKES 8oz/250g (serves 8–10)

- 5½oz (150g) long red chiles (6–8)
- 10 Thai red chiles
- 1 small tomato, about 2¾oz (80g)
- 2¼oz (70g) round shallots (4–5)
- 6 large garlic cloves
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 stick of lemongrass
- 2 lime leaves
- 5 tbsp (75ml) vegetable oil
- 1½ tbsp lime juice (1–2 limes)
- 2 tbsp golden granulated sugar (see Notes)

Trim and roughly chop the chiles (remove the inner membrane and seeds if you'd like it less spicy), halve the tomato, and peel the shallots and garlic. Put them in the bowl of a small food processor with the salt, and pulse to form a coarse paste.

Bash the lemongrass with a rolling pin to open the fibers, and crunch the lime leaves in your fist to crack them. Heat the oil over medium-low heat in a frying pan, add the blended paste, lemongrass and lime leaves, and cook, stirring occasionally, until most of the liquid has evaporated and the raw scent has cooked out (8–10 minutes). Meanwhile, squeeze the lime juice.

Discard the lemongrass and lime leaves, then stir in the sugar and lime juice. Cook for 1 minute more until the sugar has dissolved and the paste is glossy. Turn off the heat and transfer to a serving bowl.

Pictured here

Notes:

⚫ *To store it for up to 1 month, keep it covered with a layer of oil in a jar in the fridge.*
⚫ *Traditionally, white (rock) sugar would be used, but because some white sugar is not entirely vegan, I usually opt for golden sugar instead.*

◀ CONTENTS

Sweets

Many of the dishes in this chapter were born out of the innate human desire to celebrate. In Puerto Rico, the velvety coconut pudding Tembleque is a festive dessert that marks the onset of Christmas. In China, glutinous rice balls stuffed with a sweetened red-bean paste, called Jian Dui, are served at the start of Lunar New Year; their perfectly puffed shape symbolizes prosperity and good fortune. Even during moments of mourning, humans have found ways to celebrate. Lokma, a Turkish treat made from leavened dough that has been soaked in rose-water syrup, is often handed out to neighbors and even passersby as an opportunity to honor and remember the life of a loved one.

But there are other reasons why naturally plant-based desserts came into existence. When poorer communities in northern Italy foraged fallen chestnuts at the height of fall and ground them to use instead of scarce wheat flour, they eventually created the cake called Castagnaccio. Thanks to the natural sweetness of the nuts, it is nowadays enjoyed as a dessert. The Chinese snow fungus mushroom soup Yin'er Tang, with its pleasant sweetness, is the perfect way to end a meal, but the dish is deeply ingrained in ancient Chinese medicine. Every single ingredient serves a beneficial purpose, from strengthening the digestive system to alleviating stress. And the simplest form of dessert, serving a ripe piece of fruit, such as red wine–steeped peaches in Pesche al Vino Rosso, can be linked back to our evolutionary history and our natural craving for sweets. Already as hunter-gatherers, our brains were wired to indulge in fruit at the peak of summer, when sugar levels are at their highest, so our bodies could convert as much excess sugar as possible into fat reserves for the colder months ahead.

A plant-based diet may seem restrictive at first, but this chapter is not about stripping back—it's a celebration of that magical intersection between the unpredictable trajectory of life and human creativity, which has gifted us with incredible diversity all around the planet. Before I set out on this journey, I hadn't heard of, let alone tasted, most of the desserts featured here. Yet, after sinking my teeth into warm *lokma* in Izmir or cutting a slice of freshly baked *castagnaccio* in Tuscany, I discovered cultural gems that might have otherwise remained hidden from my palate. Limiting my choices broadened my horizon. And boy, does that taste sweet.

Pesche al Vino Rosso: *Peaches in Red Wine*
Latte di Mandorla: *Sweetened Almond Milk*
Biancomangiare: *Almond Milk Pudding*
Castagnaccio: *Tuscan Chestnut Cake*
Kabak Tatlısı: *Pumpkin & Tahini Dessert*
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Tembleque: *Coconut Pudding*

Pesche al Vino Rosso

Peaches in Red Wine

Italy

Sometimes, nature has done all the work for us. A peach, sun-ripened at the peak of summer, is in itself a perfect dessert. But Italians have given it a little twist...

Traditionally, the peaches are refrigerated in red wine and served once cold. It's equally delicious, but, respectfully, somewhat reminiscent of a bowl of sangria, because the fruit retains its bright color. When I visited Ristorante Mecenate, a Tuscan Slow Food restaurant overlooking Piazza San Francesco in Lucca, the peaches arrived having the same color as the barely sweetened wine they were served in. The trick is simple, but requires patience: soaking the peaches for three days in a completely airtight container allows the wine to be drawn into the flesh, turning it dark red, for a simple yet sophisticated dessert. To give it a more refined look, you can also blanch and peel the peaches before soaking them, but as the Italian saying goes, "peel figs for your friend, but peel peaches for your enemy."

ACTIVE TIME 10 minutes
TOTAL TIME 10 minutes, plus refrigerating, ideally for 3 days
SERVES 4

- 3–5 ripe yellow peaches, about 1lb 5oz (600g)
- 1 tbsp golden granulated sugar
- 1¾ cups (400ml) Italian red wine such as Chianti or Montepulciano

Cut the peaches into bite-sized pieces. For a slightly more refined look and mouthfeel, cut around the stone, giving you two larger pieces and two smaller ones, rather than cutting the peach in half and twisting it open. Then simply cut into chunks.

Transfer the pieces to an airtight container, sprinkle over the sugar, and pour in enough red wine that the peaches just begin to float. Close the container, shake gently to distribute the sugar, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour but ideally for 3 days.

Divide the peaches with some of the wine among four bowls, and serve.

Pesche al Vino Rosso

Latte di Mandorla

Sweetened Almond Milk

Italy

At his farm, surrounded by wild pear, olive, and almond trees in the rolling landscape near Noto in Sicily, Slow Food agriculturist Concetto Scardaci showed me the traditional way to make Sicilian *latte di mandorla*. It's an artisanal process, during which the ground almonds are wrapped in a fine muslin cloth, then soaked briefly in a bowl of water before the contents are repeatedly squeezed to strain off the resulting white-colored "milk."

The slightly quicker method below will yield an equally satisfying result, even without using Sicilian almonds. Soaking the nuts removes some of the astringent flavors and darker hues that come from the skins of commercially grown almonds, resulting in a rich, pure liquid. This is the ideal base for making Biancomangiare, a soothing dessert from the island.

ACTIVE TIME 15 minutes
TOTAL TIME 15 minutes plus soaking overnight and cooling in the fridge

MAKES 4 1/3 cups (1 liter)

- 5 1/2 oz (150g) raw almonds (skin on)
- 3 tbsp golden caster sugar, or demerara or turbinado, refined in a food processor

Soak the almonds in at least 2 cups plus 2 tablespoons (500ml) of water overnight.

The next day, drain and rinse them, then put them in the jug of a blender, along with 4 1/3 cups (1 liter) of fresh water, and blend well. Strain the liquid in batches through a fine muslin cloth, and squeeze out as much of the almond milk as possible. You can use the leftover pulp in overnight muesli or for baking.

Put the sugar in a 2-pint/1-quart (1-liter) bottle, then pour in the almond milk and give it a good shake. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour and shake again before serving. It will keep for 4–5 days covered in the fridge.

Latte di Mandorla

Biancomangiare

Almond Milk Pudding

Italy

The origins of *biancomangiare* (literally "to eat white" or "white food") can be traced back to the Arab traders who introduced almond trees to Sicily. Adapting to the dry climate of the southern part of the island, the almond trees preserved water by producing more concentrated oils and intensified flavor in their nuts. These highly prized Sicilian almonds gave rise to local delicacies such as Latte di Mandorla, *frutta Martorana* (fruit-shaped marzipan), and, of course, *biancomangiare*.

In the Middle Ages, various versions of the dish were served at banquets, often incorporating fish or white meat. But today, *biancomangiare* has found its way into the heart of many Sicilian kitchens, where the subtle flavors of almonds, lemon, and cinnamon make a satisfying dessert.

ACTIVE TIME 20 minutes
TOTAL TIME 35 minutes, plus making the almond milk and 1 hour setting
SERVES 4

- 2 cups plus 2 tbsp (500ml) homemade almond milk (see Latte di Mandorla)
- 3½oz (100g) golden granulated sugar
- 1¾oz (50g) cornstarch
- ¼ tsp salt
- 1 small cinnamon stick
- 1 organic unwaxed lemon
- ¾oz (20g) almonds

Make the almond milk (remember to soak the almonds the night before), but don't add the sugar. In a small saucepan, whisk the sugar, cornstarch, salt, and 4 tablespoons of the almond milk to form a slurry, then whisk in the remaining milk. Add the cinnamon stick, followed by a wide strip of pared lemon peel. Slowly bring the liquid to a gentle boil while stirring often, to allow the lemon peel and cinnamon to infuse the liquid.

Once the mixture begins to boil, remove the cinnamon and lemon peel, and continue simmering until the liquid begins to thicken. Turn the heat down to low and whisk for 5 minutes more. Divide the mixture evenly among four bowls, or molds measuring about 4in (10cm) in diameter or ½ cup (125ml) in volume, allow to cool for 15 minutes, then refrigerate for at least 1 hour to firm up.

Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C) and roast the almonds for 10 minutes, or until slightly golden when cut in half. Slice or roughly chop them. To serve, tip out the *biancomangiare* onto a plate and top with the roasted almonds.

Note:
This dessert is best with homemade almond milk for a concentrated almond flavor and clear, white color. Store-bought almond milk would give it an opaque look.

Biancomangiare

Castagnaccio

Tuscan Chestnut Cake

Italy

Tuscany might be known for wine, *pasta fresca,* and truffles the size of golf balls. Yet, hidden in the forests lies another secret of Tuscan cuisine: chestnuts. They were once considered a food of the poor, who foraged the fallen nuts, then dried and ground them into chestnut flour when wheat was scarce. Nowadays, chestnuts are a highly prized fall luxury.

Tasting this cake for the first time is a plunge into the unexpected. It's sweet, with hints of chocolate. Once mixed with water, the pale chestnut flour transforms into the color of sesame halva. Even more surprising are the other ingredients. Olive oil, walnuts, and rosemary all mingle to create a delicacy that has conquered the hearts of many Italians, but remains largely unknown outside the country—a great loss for those who have not yet discovered it, and a satisfying gain for those who dare to try it.

ACTIVE TIME 20 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 5 minutes
SERVES 8

- 1¾oz (50g raisins
- 2oz (60g) walnuts
- 2 sprigs of rosemary
- 6 tbsp (90ml) extra virgin olive oil
- 10oz (300g) chestnut flour
- ⅓ tsp salt
- 2oz (50g) pine nuts

Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). Meanwhile, put the raisins in a small bowl, cover with warm water, and soak for 10 minutes.

Roughly chop the walnuts and strip the rosemary leaves. Grease a 10in (25cm) round cake pan with 2 tablespoons of the olive oil.

Sift the chestnut flour into a large bowl, add the salt, whisk in 1¾ cups (420ml) of water to form a smooth batter, then whisk in 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Drain and squeeze out the raisins, and stir them into the batter along with half of the walnuts and pine nuts. Pour the batter into the pan and top it with the remaining nuts and the rosemary leaves. Drizzle over the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil.

Bake for 30–35 minutes until the top has formed cracks all over. Leave to cool for 10 minutes before removing it from the cake pan. Cut it into slices to serve.

Notes:

⚫ *Store leftover cake in an airtight container for 1–2 days.*
⚫ *Food writer Giulia Scarpaleggia first taught me how to make castagnaccio in her studio in the heart of Tuscany. Her trick for even more flavor is to soak the raisins in vin santo, a local sweet wine. Delicious!*

Castagnaccio

Kabak Tatlısı

Pumpkin & Tahini Dessert

Türkiye

The entrances to traditional Turkish eateries are often adorned with giant, pale-green pumpkins with bright-orange flesh. It's an unspoken invitation to experience one of Türkiye's most beloved desserts. I'll never forget seeing vendors near İstanbul's Süleymaniye Mosque, opening the floodgates of a giant vat filled with tahini to douse the tender-cooked pumpkin before sprinkling it with walnuts. It's a cheffy combination one would expect to find on the menu of a modern restaurant, but this dessert is at the heart of street and home kitchens alike.

The amount of sugar used in this recipe might seem alarming, but don't worry. It serves as a tool to draw out the moisture, but the finished pumpkin is mild. The level of sweetness really depends on how much of the syrup you serve with it, yet even the sweetest of teeth will end up with plenty of syrup left in the pan. Store it in a jar in the fridge and use it to flavor other sweets, or even your tea and coffee.

ACTIVE TIME 20 minutes
TOTAL TIME 35 minutes plus 6 hours macerating and 2 hours cooling
SERVES 4

- ¼–½ Turkish pumpkin (about 1¾ lb/800g untrimmed weight), or use butternut squash
- 7½oz (210g) golden granulated sugar
- 1oz (30g) walnuts
- 8 tbsp (80g) tahini

Remove and discard the seeds and stringy flesh from the pumpkin. Cut into four wedges, peel them, and chop into 1¼–1½in (3–4cm) chunks until you have 1lb 2oz (500g) prepared pumpkin flesh.

Transfer the chunks to a saucepan wide enough to fit them snugly into a single layer. It's fine if they overlap a little, but there shouldn't be many gaps. Sprinkle over the sugar, then cover with a lid, and leave to macerate for 6 hours (or overnight) until most of the sugar has turned into a syrup.

Heat the contents of the pan until the syrup comes to a boil, then cook over medium-low heat for 15–20 minutes or until completely knife tender. Meanwhile, coarsely crush the walnuts in a small food processor.

Turn off the heat and let the pumpkin cool entirely in the pan, with the lid slightly ajar (1–2 hours).

To serve, divide the pumpkin pieces among shallow bowls, and drizzle over some of the syrup and the tahini. Top with the crushed walnuts.

Kabak Tatlısı

Aşure

Noah's Ark Pudding

Türkiye

It might be the oldest dessert in the world. According to legend, the first *aşure* was made with the leftover grains, fruits, and nuts on Noah's Ark after it came to rest on Mount Ararat (now eastern Anatolia). Today, it's a popular pudding in Türkiye, though you have to be lucky to find it during your travels—it's usually only prepared during Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, when enormous pots are cooked, and bowls are handed out to friends and neighbors as a token of togetherness. I learned to cook *aşure* from Sinem Özler at her acclaimed İstanbul restaurant Seraf Vadi.

ACTIVE TIME 35 minutes
TOTAL TIME 2 hours 25 minutes, plus overnight soaking and 2 hours cooling
SERVES 10

Pudding

- 9oz (250g) peeled wheat (aşurelik buğday), or pearled barley
- 2¾oz (80g) dried chickpeas
- 2¾oz (80g) dried navy beans
- ½ tbsp salt plus ¼ tsp
- 1¾oz (50g) blanched hazelnuts
- 1¾oz (50g) blanched almonds
- 1 large cinnamon stick
- 3–4 cloves
- 6–8 dried apricots, about 1¾oz (50g)
- 3–4 dried figs, about 1¾oz (50g)
- 2 tbsp golden sultanas or raisins, about 1oz (30g)
- ¾ cup (150g) golden granulated sugar
- 1 organic unwaxed orange

Garnish (optional—choose as few or as many as you like)

- ground cinnamon
- a large handful of pistachios, crushed in a food processor
- pomegranate seeds
- roasted almonds, roughly sliced
- a handful of dried currants, soaked in water for 10 minutes
- a few walnuts, roughly chopped
- 2–3 fresh figs, quartered

Soak the wheat, chickpeas, and navy beans in separate bowls, in around 5 times their weight in water overnight, adding ½ tablespoon of salt to the chickpea-soaking water.

The next day, drain the wheat and return it to its bowl. Rinse it well by rubbing it between your hands, then drain and repeat until the water runs clear. Put the drained wheat and 8½ cups (2 liters) of water in a large, 5-quart (5-liter) casserole. Bring it to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer, covered, for 1½ hours, stirring occasionally, until the wheat has softened.

Meanwhile, drain and rinse the chickpeas and put them in a lidded saucepan with 6¼ cups (1.5 liters) of water. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat and simmer, with the lid slightly ajar, for 30 minutes. Drain the navy beans, add to the chickpeas, simmer for 45 minutes more, then drain and set aside. While the wheat is cooking, preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). Roast the hazelnuts and almonds for 10 minutes until just lightly golden. If you're using almonds as a garnish, roast a few extra now. Set aside to cool.

When the wheat has softened, add the chickpeas, navy beans, cinnamon, and cloves (put the spices in a spice bag, if preferred), and simmer, covered, for 15 minutes more. Meanwhile, roughly chop the dried apricots and figs. Stir in the hazelnuts, almonds, apricots, figs, sultanas, sugar, and the ¼ teaspoon salt and cook, covered, for 10 minutes. Grate in the zest of the orange and simmer, covered, for a final 5 minutes. Turn off the heat, discard the cinnamon stick and cloves, and let it cool with the lid left ajar (1½–2 hours). Eat at room temperature or chilled, but beware that it'll thicken quite a lot in the fridge, especially overnight.

To serve, divide the *aşure* among bowls and garnish with the toppings of your choice. I like to do it the way Sinem showed me (see picture): sprinkle the cinnamon in a cross shape, add crushed pistachios along the rim of two opposite quarters, then fill the quarters with pomegranate seeds, almonds, dried currants, and walnuts, and place a quartered fig in the center.

Aşure

Lokma

Fried Dough Balls in Rose-Water Syrup

Türkiye

In İzmir, the largest city on Türkiye's Aegean coast, the captivating scent of fried dough is almost a daily temptation. People regularly queue at food trucks for fresh *lokma*—but there is something unusual at work here. No one is paying for them. *Lokma*, thought of as moments of happiness, are handed out as gifts by families for celebrations such as weddings, or on days of mourning, in memory of the deceased.

When baker Mustafa Öztapacı showed me how they are made, I watched in awe as he balanced the almost-liquid dough midair, somehow turning them into perfectly round doughnuts with a central hole, while throwing them into the hot oil. Home cooks usually make an easier, spherical version known as *palace lokma*. Biting into them is sensational, the crispy surface giving way as they release their syrup in one burst of flavor.

ACTIVE TIME 40 minutes
TOTAL TIME 40 minutes, plus 30–45 minutes proofing
MAKES 30–40

Syrup

- 2½ cups (500g) golden granulated sugar
- a few drops of lemon juice
- ¼ tsp rose water (optional)

Batter

- 14oz (400g) all-purpose flour
- 1 tbsp golden granulated sugar
- 1 tsp salt
- ¾oz (20g) fresh yeast, or a ¼oz (7g) packet dried yeast

Frying

- 4⅓ cups (1 liter) vegetable oil, plus a few tablespoons for scooping the lokma

To make the syrup, put the sugar and 1¼ cups (300ml) of water in a pan, bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 2–3 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the sugar dissolves. Turn off the heat, stir in the lemon juice (which will prevent the sugar from crystallizing) and rose water, if using, and set aside to cool.

Meanwhile, put the flour, sugar, and salt in a large bowl. Crumble in the yeast, then pour in ½ cup plus 4 teaspoons (375ml) of lukewarm water and use a whisk to mix everything together. Beat the batter with the whisk for 5 minutes to kick-start the gluten development, then cover with a damp kitchen towel and proof for 30–45 minutes (depending on ambient temperature) until bubbly. When the dough is nearly

ready, heat the oil in a wide, heavy-based pan to 355°F (180°C). To check if it's hot enough, place the end of a wooden spoon into the oil; there should be tiny bubbles rising rapidly to the surface.

Put a teaspoon in a small glass and pour in enough oil to submerge the bowl part of the spoon. Now grab a handful of dough in your palm, squeeze a walnut-sized ball through the gap between your thumb and index finger to scoop it off with the greased teaspoon and carefully add it to the hot oil.

Repeat until the oil's surface is covered with floating balls. Fry them, turning occasionally, until golden (6–8 minutes), then transfer with a slotted spoon into the sugar syrup. Leave to soak for 2–3 minutes, then transfer to a shallow bowl. Repeat with the remaining batter and serve warm.

Note:
Adding rose water is not traditional in İzmir, but it's Mustafa's secret touch, inspired by the dish's Arabic roots.

Lokma

Chikki

Peanut Brittle

India

Jaggery is India's sweetener of choice. It's made by boiling fresh sugarcane juice for hours, until a thick syrup remains that firms up as it cools, and is far more flavorful than ordinary refined sugar. It is even prized for its medicinal properties in Ayurvedic treatments.

Jaggery truly shines in *chikki*, which is loved by people of all ages, often finding its way into children's lunch boxes. The secret to making crispy *chikki* is to cook the jaggery until it reaches the "hard-crack" stage. Patience will reward you with one of India's best sweet treats.

ACTIVE TIME 35 minutes
TOTAL TIME 40 minutes, plus 15–20 minutes cooling
SERVES 8

- 7oz (200g) raw peanuts, skin on, or unsalted and skinless roasted peanuts
- 4 cardamom pods, or a pinch of ground cardamom (optional)
- pinch of salt
- 5½oz (150g) jaggery
- vegetable oil, for greasing

If using raw peanuts, toast them in a dry frying pan over medium-low heat, until they have light brown roasting spots all over (8–10 minutes). Keep the pan to hand. Transfer the peanuts to a baking sheet and let them cool for 5 minutes, then rub them between your hands to loosen the skins. Transfer the peanuts to a bowl and discard the skins left behind.

Return the skinned (or pre-roasted) nuts to the baking sheet and use the bottom of a bowl to crush them in half or slightly smaller pieces. Remove the seeds from the cardamom pods, if using, and grind them to a fine powder in a pestle and mortar. Sprinkle the ground cardamom and salt over the peanuts.

Fill a small bowl with water, line your kitchen countertop with a piece of parchment paper the size of a medium baking sheet, and grease a knife and rolling pin with oil. Give the frying pan a wipe, then coarsely grate the jaggery and put it in the pan with 1 tablespoon of water. Bring it to a boil over medium heat, while stirring it often with a spatula.

Reduce the heat to low and cook for 5–10 minutes more, stirring regularly to prevent the sides from burning. It will first bubble furiously and eventually turn darker. To test the consistency, drop a bit of the jaggery into the bowl of water. It should harden almost instantly into a texture that you can easily break (this is called the hard-crack stage). If it's still soft or breaks into strings, cook it for longer and test again.

When it's ready, working quickly, turn off the heat, add the peanuts to the pan, and fold them in until the jaggery coats them evenly. Transfer to the parchment paper and use the rolling pin to flatten the mixture into a thin layer (¼–⅜in/6–8mm), keeping a rectangular shape by pressing the rolling pin and knife against the sides occasionally. While the mixture is still warm, use the greased knife to score it into even squares or rectangles, then let them cool completely (15–20 minutes) before breaking them apart. Store in an airtight container for up to 1 month.

Notes:

⚫ *Change it up: peanut* chikki *is the most common version, but you can make it with just about any nut, or even sesame seeds.*

⚫ *An easy way to clean the pan is to fill it with water and bring it to a boil. The remaining jaggery will simply dissolve.*

Chikki

Yin'er Tang

Snow Fungus Mushroom Soup

China

Yang Guifei, one of the legendary four beauties of Ancient China, was said to have a face so fair that it put flowers to shame. When asked about her secret to her youthful complexion, she attributed it to *yin'er tang*.

Traditionally eaten as a dessert, this soup is rooted in ancient Chinese medicine; each ingredient is cherished for its own benefits. Snow fungus is said to reduce inflammation, support lung function, and maintain a glowing complexion. Lotus seeds are said to improve kidney, heart, and spleen function; and longans (a relative of the lychee) are believed to replenish the spirit and balance the appetite.

The benefits of *jujubes* were immortalized in another legend. On his journey through a forest, an ailing king encountered the god of longevity. After asking him for a remedy to his suffering, the god gave him three *jujubes*. The king ate the fruits and instantly felt rejuvenated, a story that manifested itself into the saying "three jujubes a day keeps the doctor away."

According to Chinese medicine, the benefits are amplified when combined, making this dessert a potion for good health—although I tend to use a little more sugar to give the soup a satisfying, mild sweetness.

ACTIVE TIME 15 minutes
TOTAL TIME 1 hour 5 minutes
SERVES 10

- 1 dried snow fungus, also called white fungus, about 1–1¼oz (30–40g)
- 8 dried jujubes, also called red or Chinese dates
- 1 tbsp dried longan
- 1 tbsp lotus seeds
- 3½oz (100g) golden rock sugar (or golden granulated sugar)
- 2 tbsp dried goji berries

Place the snow fungus root-side down in a large bowl, cover with cold water, and let it soak for 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, rinse the *jujubes*, slice them in half lengthwise, open them like a plum, and remove the stone. Put the *jujubes*, dried longan, lotus seeds, sugar, and 8½ cups (2 liters) of cold water in a large pan and set aside.

Drain and rinse the snow fungus, use scissors to remove and discard the knobbly root, then tear the fungus into bite-sized pieces and add them to the pan. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat and simmer, covered, for 30 minutes until the soup has an orange color, tastes pleasantly sweet, and is slightly syrupy.

Turn off the heat, add the goji berries, and let them soften for 2 minutes in the residual heat. Serve warm, or let it cool, and refrigerate for a chilled dessert.

Yin’er Tang

Jian Dui

Stuffed Sesame Balls

China

Lunar New Year celebrations set the tone for the months ahead. Symbolic foods play a pivotal role—and *jian dui* are as symbolic as they are fun to eat. As you fry them, they inflate in the hot oil, doubling in size until they float on the surface. It's a transformation that foretells good fortune and prosperity, while the spherical shape signifies unity and harmony.

ACTIVE TIME 1 hour 40 minutes
TOTAL TIME 3 hours 15 minutes, plus soaking overnight
MAKES 10

Red bean paste (or use store-bought)

- 3¼oz (90g) dried red beans (adzuki)
- ½ tsp baking soda
- 5 tbsp (60g) dark brown sugar

Jian dui

- 5⅔ tbsp (70g) golden granulated sugar
- 5½oz (150g) glutinous rice flour
- 7 tbsp (75g) white sesame seeds
- ½ cup (150g) red bean paste (store-bought or see below)
- 4⅓ cups (1 liter) vegetable oil for deep-frying

To make the red bean paste, soak the beans in 1¾ cups (400ml) of water overnight. Next day, drain, rinse, and put in a saucepan with the baking soda and 2¾ cups (700ml) of water. Bring to a boil. Skim off any foam and simmer, uncovered, for 45 minutes or until soft. Drain again, keeping the cooking liquid; cool for at least 10 minutes. Blend the beans with 6½ tablespoons (100ml) of the liquid until smooth. Pour into a nonstick frying pan, add the sugar, bring to a boil, then cook over medium-low heat for 10–15 minutes, stirring often, until reduced to a moldable paste. Transfer to a bowl, cool, cover loosely, and refrigerate until needed.

While the bean paste cools, start the dough for the sesame balls. Combine the sugar with 6½ tablespoons (100ml) of water in a saucepan, bring to a boil, and swirl the pan until the sugar has dissolved. In a bowl, combine the rice flour and hot sugar water, then use chopsticks to mix it to a rough dough. Tip it out and knead until firm but smooth (2–3 minutes). Transfer to a clean bowl, cover with a damp kitchen towel, and let it rest for 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, put the sesame seeds in a shallow bowl; fill a second small bowl with water. With moist hands, roll ½ cup (150g) of the bean paste into 10 grape-size balls. Divide the dough into 10 pieces about 1oz (30g) each, roll into balls, and cover with a damp kitchen towel. One ball at a time, make an indentation with your thumb, squeezing it in a circular motion to form a cup. Add a ball of bean paste, pinch the dough closed, and roll to form a smooth ball. Continue with the rest. Dip each ball into the water, use a fork to transfer it to the sesame seeds, and shake the bowl to coat evenly. Use your hands to gently press the seeds in. Set aside and continue with the rest. Heat the oil to 265°F (130°C). If you place the end of a wooden spoon into the oil, a few bubbles will rise gently to the surface.

Line a rack with paper towel. Fry 4–5 balls at a time until they begin to float (6–8 minutes). Use a slotted spoon to keep them submerged until they have doubled in size. Increase the temperature to 355°F 180°C. (If you don't have a thermometer, increase the heat and reduce it once the balls begin to turn golden.) Fry for 6–8 minutes more, or until the balls are beautifully golden. Transfer to the paper towel, let the oil cool down to 265°F (130°C), and continue with the rest. Serve warm.

Jian Dui

Tembleque

Coconut Pudding

Puerto Rico

It's easy to see parallels between *tembleque* and Sicilian Biancomangiare, although one is made from coconut, the other from almond milk. That's because they both share a similar method, which was introduced to Puerto Rico by Spanish explorers, where it was quickly adapted to the culinary culture. Nowadays, *tembleque* is inseparable from Puerto Rican cuisine. More than just a dessert, it marks the beginning of the annual Christmas festivities that last for 45 days.

The word "*tembleque*" translates as "wobbly," which accurately describes the dessert's appearance but doesn't do justice to its velvety texture. It's a celebration of the rich flavors of fresh coconut milk, which elevates a simple pudding to a memorable experience.

ACTIVE TIME 35 minutes
TOTAL TIME 40 minutes, plus 1 hour refrigerating
SERVES 4

Coconut milk (or use store-bought)

- 1 large raw coconut

Tembleque

- 6 tbsp (75g) golden granulated sugar
- 4 tbsp (30g) cornstarch
- ¼ tsp salt
- 1¾ cups (400ml) coconut milk (from above or use a 14fl oz/400ml can)
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon, to serve

If making your own coconut milk, hold the coconut over a bowl and use the back of a sturdy knife (or use a rolling pin, but it might leave dents) to knock firmly on the center of the shell, going around the "equator" until it cracks open. Catch the water in the bowl (you can drink or cook with it), then use a round-ended butter knife to pierce between the flesh and shell. Wiggle the knife around the flesh to loosen it (it might take a few turns before the flesh pops loose), then peel off the brown skin.

Weigh the flesh, roughly chop it, and put it in the jug of a blender with 1.5 times the weight in water. Blend until smooth, strain it through a sieve lined with fine muslin, and squeeze out as much coconut milk as you can (you can dehydrate the leftover coconut pulp to make your own coconut flour). Measure out 1¾ cups (400ml); see Note.

For the *tembleque*, put the sugar, cornstarch, salt, and 3 tablespoons of the coconut milk in a small saucepan, whisk to a smooth slurry, then whisk in the remaining coconut milk. Place it over medium heat until it comes to a gentle boil, stirring constantly, then reduce the heat and simmer until it begins to

thicken. Continue stirring for 5 minutes more, then divide among four small bowls or molds measuring about 3 x 1⅓in (8 x 3.5cm). Let it cool slightly, then refrigerate for at least 1 hour to firm up. Gently loosen the *tembleque* by pulling it away from the sides, then tip it out onto a plate, dust with cinnamon, and serve.

Note:
Store any leftover coconut milk for 3–4 days, covered, in the fridge.

Tembleque

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This book is a celebration of recipes that are rooted in culture, and it wouldn't have been possible to do them justice without some incredible chefs and home cooks who invited me into their kitchens, let me peek over their shoulders, and shared the whispers of their ancestors.

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About the author

Julius Fiedler is a filmmaker-turned-content-creator on a clear mission: to promote an unprocessed, more natural approach to plant-based food.

After moving to the UK from Germany in 2017, Julius' career in food began to take flight during the Covid pandemic, when he hosted free, online sourdough baking classes under the name "Baking Hermann" (German bakers often call their sourdough starter Hermann in tribute to the namesake friendship cake). He then went on to become one of Jamie's food stylists at Jamie Oliver HQ, before deciding to focus on his own food channels.

His videos attract millions of views across Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, and are packed with techniques for mastering traditional vegan dishes, many of which he learns directly from local cooks in his well-documented travels around the world. Fueled by the premise that everything we eat affects nature, he is hopeful that these dishes, having stood the test of time and being in tune with nature, will lead us toward a more sustainable vegan diet. He is a proud ambassador for Slow Food, and this is his debut book.

You can find Julius on Instagram **@hermann**, on TikTok **@bakinghermann**, and on YouTube **@BakingHermann**.

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